THE FIGHTING DOCTOR

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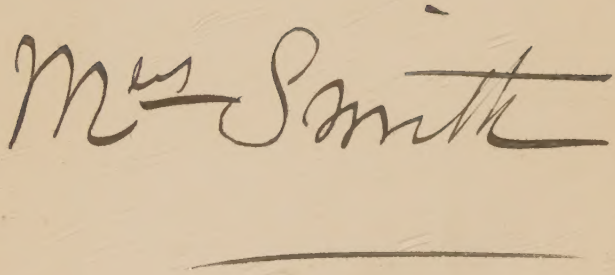

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By

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"The Crossways," etc.

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CHAPTER I

DOCTOR THORPE was taking a hasty dinner before his evening office hour, which of late had actually begun to be rather filled with patients, although the young physician was having a long, hard struggle among the rural Pennsylvania Dutch to overcome their prejudice against the modern method of dispensing with drugs in favor of sanitary living; not to mention the much deeper prejudice against a doctor who was "a city stranger" and who "did not mind to his own business," but went about trying to stir up the whole sleepy township with his howl for good roads and no graft. Also the rumor, spread abroad by his prying and loquacious, albeit loyal, housekeeper, of his "tony ways" and other eccentricities, such as his insisting upon his meals being served in the

dining-room instead of the kitchen; his daily (not weekly) baths; his having the parlor shutters open on week days as well as Sundays; his motor runabout; his sleeping on a cot on the roof of the porch; these and other madnesses had served to intensify the local prejudice against "a towner."

The square brick house in which the doctor lived stood twenty feet back from the country roadside and was pleasantly surrounded by beautiful old trees. The appointments of the few rooms which he used, the good pictures, the books, proclaimed him a man of such inheritance and tastes as to be an exotic in Daniel Webster Township. Indeed, one of the many things which worked against his success here was that subtle atmosphere, in his general tone and bearing, of a man of culture and breeding; naturally, an unfamiliar type in Webster.

The few who employed his services were those who failed to be helped by the powwow doctor and the township quack. These, however, were a steadily increasing number.

It had been a strenuous day for the doctor. In fact, he had on this day been tried before the Lebanon County Court to answer charges brought against him by the farmers of Webster Township for "damaging" their roads by using a road-drag to clear away the mud that he might run his infernal automobile, which frightened their horses and endangered their lives. The jury, however (composed of town people, not farmers, and therefore a bit more open-minded), having taken a look at the doctor's photographs of the roads "Before" and "After" the drag had gone over them, and a few of the automobilists on the jury sympathizing with his statement that before using the drag he had "stuck in the mud, eaten mud, been clothed in mud, dreamed of mud," his acquittal had come as a quick and easy victory, to the confounding of his prosecutors who had supposed that their own triumph was a foregone conclusion.

This supposition on their part argued a colossal ignorance as to the sort of man they were dealing with, though his stubborn jaw

and stocky build, his countenance of mingled sternness and good humor, the sharpness of his black eyes, gave an impression, at sight, of a personality strong enough to meet, with an unruffled front, almost any sort of emergency. Indeed, difficulties were, to a temperament like his, only a stimulus to his energies, and the unexpected antagonism he had met in this community, into which he had dropped upon the death of the former doctor, had served to develop all his fighting powers.

"And now, Susan, the trial being over," he cheerfully remarked to his housekeeper, a stout, comfortable looking woman of middle age who waited upon him at his dinner, "the next thing is to get myself elected to the board of road supervisors and make things go! Once I'm a road supervisor, madam, automobiles, wagons and carriages won't stick in the mud in Webster Township! And there'll be no more graft! Another glass of water, please, Susan. I wish *you* had a vote to give me! I'm going to have a tough fight of it, to convert

enough of my enemies to vote me into the board!"

"Ach, Doctor, now you ain't that dumn as to think you could ever *make* it if you run fur superwisor, are you? Why, there 'd be twenty woters ag'in you to one that would be fur you!"

The doctor's relations with his housekeeper were not, as might appear, exceedingly democratic; on the contrary they were absolutely autocratic; for though theoretically inclined to socialism, he recognized that in this community he could keep no servant whom he did not treat as his superior. What was more, he found it a bit lonesome living among enemies, and Susan, being condescendingly friendly, sometimes served as a safety-valve for his overcharged feelings.

"To be sure," she went on, "if the women could wote you 'd get in; fur all of 'em that had single daughters would give *you* a wote, you not bein' promised to no one; leastways, not so far as *I* know," she added insinuatingly, curiosity fairly radi-

ating from her. She paused expectantly, but the doctor not rising to her bait, she continued, "And you bein' so well fixed, with a plenty to live on even if you ain't got much practice—"

"Practice, Susan? I've heard my office bell tinkle three times in the last ten minutes. Three patients waiting in there for me, and you say I have n't a flourishing practice?"

"One of them three," explained Susan whose interest in the doctor's affairs was equaled only by her zeal in disseminating her knowledge of them, "is Lizzie Yutzy come to jew you down on the big bill you sent her. The other one is Meely Swartzentraber that says if you *won't* give her a big bottle of soothing drops fur her baby she 'll take him to Doc Weitzel into Lebanon yet! And the third—"

"Well? The third?"

Susan lowered her voice. "It's that there Dietz girl that 's in trouble!"

"Um—m."

"Yes, sir."

"None of it very lucrative or promising, Susan, to be sure."

"You see," said Susan, "when you 've went and got the political boss so ag'in you that he even keeps *patients* off of you, what kin you expect?"

"Mike Goodman has no cause to love me!" the doctor admitted grimly; "because my fight for good roads is, in time, going to loosen his grip on the county treasury. That 's why he told the court to-day that I was 'a dangerous nuisance.' I am that — to a grafter like Mike!"

"To be sure Mike he 's a politician, but I never conceited he was n't perfeckly honest, Doctor," said Susan much shocked.

"An honest politician, Susan? Well, the thing 's not impossible, perhaps. Some corn, please. Thank you. But it 's rare, Susan — da — divinely rare, I should say."

"You ought to have heard Mike jaw me here last week fur comin' to housekeep fur you, Doctor! The old sour-ball talked that ugly to me, you 'd have thought he was my

own husband yet instead of only a neighbor-man!"

"Your experiences in husbands, Susan!" said the doctor, shaking his head.

"I certainly have had my experiences with 'em!" sighed Susan. "*Two* yet! And now they want to call me the Merry Widdah!"

"You 'll be the Merry Coon if you marry that Johnny that 's trying to make up to you. You 'd better warn John Kuhn that if he tries to take my good housekeeper from me I 'll run my car over him! You see I 'm a believer in the survival of the fit, and it is fitter that Kuhn should die than that I should starve — and leave Webster Township to its bad roads, bad habits and bad health."

"You need n't worry; I tole John Kuhn I 'd had enough of endowin' husbands with my worldly goods, and Roosevelt hisself could n't have me if I knowed he would n't be no good purvider. 'It ain't my fault,' John says. 'I was always unlucky.' But I tole him it ain't luck, it 's management.

'Well,' he says, 'ain't a feller lucky if the Lord gives him management?'"

"John is a philosopher!"

"That may be," returned Susan disparagingly, "but bein' a phil-whatever don't make a man a good purvider. No, I tole John and I tole Mike Goodman too, what a pleasant cooker I made you and how well you suited *me* too. So here I stay; anyways till you get married a'ready!"

"No hope of *Kuhn* voting for me then!"

"But," cried Susan, "he *has* to, to keep on the right side of me! Say, Doctor, have you saw Mike's stylish niece, Mollie Graeff, he raised?" She suddenly demanded irrelevantly. "She's just home from Kutztown Normal and now that she's got all that elegant education, she wants to be so much, no one 'round here's good enough fur her! Ezra Kuntz he used to run with her, but no, he ain't tony enough no more! Mind you what she makes 'em do up at her Uncle Mike's! — what Mike and his wife never done since they was born a'ready! — eat in the dining-room!

Why, she wants to be as tony as you yet! Like as if she was always raised in town! No eatin' in the kitchen fur *her* now she 's got such a die-ploma or what! And a napkin she must have, comp'ny or no comp'ny — *her!* They say she tried to work Mike fur such a bathroom — yes, like the one you put in upstairs here; but there Mike he was fur stoppin'. That, he says, he don't do, die-ploma or no die-ploma! Ach, but it got her proud, goin' to Kutztown Normal!"

"A little learning and a little gentility are very dangerous things, Susan."

"And they say she 's so fancy! Six shirt-waists she had in the wash last week, Sallie Spatz tole me. It wonders me that her aunt and uncle will put up with it!"

"Susan, I fear this conversation savors of gossip."

"Gossip! Me, I never gossip, Doctor. You 're the first yet that ever sayed I gossipped. Did you hear yet," she resumed, "that at the school-board meetin' last night they elected her teacher fur next term?"

"Mike Goodman's niece?" asked the doctor, frowning. "A pity! It's bad blood, the Goodman breed, and we want to get rid of its influence in this township. I'm sorry she got the school."

"It's a pity, too — ain't? — to educate a girl so as she is too good fur all the fellahs. She'll be an old maid if she don't make herself more common! *Have* you saw her yet, Doctor?"

"Not to my knowledge."

"Ach, you'd know it if you had saw her; she looks as different from the folks around here as you do yet!"

"Well, well, when I've done my work on the supervisors' board, I'll resign and get myself elected to the school board — and give them a *good* teacher."

Susan shook her head discouragingly. "Mike Goodman ain't never a-goin' to leave you get on no board of *no* kind 'round here, Doctor; you might know that, smart as *you* are!"

"You watch me, Susan! Mike's official days — and his niece's too, for that matter,

with her little airs, poor girl — are numbered."

"You don't know these here Dutch, Doctor. They 're used to doin' what Mike says and they 're sot people."

"'Sot'? The Pyramids are wobbly beside them. All the same, Susan, you watch me!"

"Then all I got to say, you or Mike — one of yous two — is got to die!"

"Just so, Susan."

"It would be enough better fur your practice, Doctor, if you left politics be. Here 's your pie."

"Thank you. Politics? I 'm not a politician, Susan, I 'm a doctor. But before we can make this community physically wholesome we 've got to clean it up morally. It 's mud I 'm fighting, the mud in the roads and the mud in the community's life. I won out to-day. I 'll win again. The Goodman breed must *go!* You 'll live to see it. A finger-bowl, please."

"A *whatever?*"

"Ah — I was wandering in my mind,

excuse me; I 'll break it to you when you are more used to me. Meantime —"

He dipped his fingers into his glass of water, wiped them and rose to go into his office.

CHAPTER II

THE mother who had come for "a big bottle of drops" for her baby, after giving the doctor a fifteen minutes' discourse on the infant's constitution, protested volubly against his verdict that the child needed no medicine.

"But, Doctor," she reasoned, "he lays and screams so, I can't get his face washed off or his hair brushed out."

"Lucky for him! A pretty looking thing he 'd be with his face off and his hair out! Stop pouring carloads of drugs into him and feeding him sauerkraut and sausage; keep him out-of-doors instead of in a darkened room and —"

"Out doors in such chilly weather, Doctor! And when he 's sick yet!"

"Keep him out of doors in the sun several hours a day and he won't need drops to make him sleep. There 's nothing the matter with him but drops, bad diet, and

want of fresh air and sun. I have no medicine for you, Mother."

The woman rose reluctantly. "Well, anyhow then I don't owe you nothin'. I 'll go to Doc Weitzel fur medicine. He don't charge as much as you anyhow, fur a office call."

"Fifty cents, Mrs. Swartzentraber, for my time and advice — which would be worth fifty dollars to you if you would follow it."

"Fifty cents fur adwisin' me to starve and freeze my baby and not give him no medicine when he's sick? I never heard of a doctor chargin' somethin' when he don't give no medicine."

"You hear of one now," smiled the doctor, who had learned in Webster Township to be tough-skinned in exacting his dues. He had never yet received a dollar of payment for his services that had not been contested.

After a little further protest on the woman's part, with quiet insistence (as a matter of principle) on his, she paid her fee and departed.

Next came the girl who was "in trouble," "Jen" Dietz, the township black sheep; a menace to all the youths of the countryside capable of being tempted by such as she. She lived "back in the mountain" and prowled at sundown from village to hamlet for her prey.

With loud lament she insisted, as the doctor rose to his medicine closet after hearing about her trouble, that she "did not know how it had happened."

"But where were *you?*" he asked as he poured a liquid into a bottle of white pellets. "Take six of these every hour when you are feeling dizzy. And, Jenny, when you are over this, if I ever see you on the streets after dark I shall have you sent where you can't do any harm. Do you understand? I'm the doctor that wants to get rid of mud in Webster Township. Here's your medicine. No charge. Use the money for the poor baby. Good night."

A little seven-year-old girl from a nearby farm was the next patient.

"Any one ill at home, Sally?" the doc-

tor asked as he drew her into his consulting office.

"No, sir. But me I came to ask fur a baby fur us. Aunt Emmy she says you got hern fur her fur fifteen dollars. Pop he could n't pay that high, but Aunt Emmy's baby is so big and fat; a thinner, cheaper one would do us. Then we could fatten it up till we had it oncet. Do you have 'em cheaper?"

"Only black ones, Sally, I 'm sorry to say. I 'm clean out of cheap white ones. I could give you a black one, now, for —"

"Ach, no, sir! Mom she would n't do it to leave me have no colored baby!" She looked up at him wistfully, a suspicion of tears in her disappointed eyes.

"You little woman-girl!" he gently patted her cheek. "Never mind, my dear, you 'll have what you want some day! Meantime — hold your hands."

He piled them full of big pink candy pellets and she went away partially consoled.

Then came Mrs. Lizzie Yutzy, a neat little elderly woman, to protest, in a steady

stream of monotonous argument, against her bill.

The doctor, after listening patiently for a few minutes, tried mildly to stem the tide of words, but though not swift she was sure, and neither to be diverted nor checked.

"Six dollars fur six wisits yet! A dollar a wisit! Ach, that's *too* much! Doc Weitzel has to come furder 'n you and he gets only seventy-five cents a wisit and *then* docks off some when a body comes to pay; and here you want a dollar a wisit! And you say you don't dock none when the bill 's paid! It' ll go ag'in you out here, Doctor! All the doctors that ever lived 'round here docks off some when a body comes to pay. But you—"

"Wait!" he broke in desperately. "Let me ask you something. Did I help you?"

"Well," she reluctantly admitted, "not as much as I had conceited you would."

"But I helped you?"

"Well, I ain't sure it was you cured me. I think it was the burnt chicken soup done it."

"The burnt chicken soup?"

"It 's the best cure anyhow fur erysipelas. You hold a chicken, with its feathers on, over the fire till it 's burnt black; then throw it in a pot of water and boil it and the soup in the pot you eat that and it cures your erysipelas."

"Great God! But why did you send for me then?"

"I was sufferin' so! And Mister he had afraid fur me. But I guess it was the burnt chicken soup cured me. And now you want six dollars off of me! Won't you take seventy-five cents a wisit? Seventy-five is all Doc Weitzel charges and it 's enough, goodness knows!"

"Not enough for me."

"You won't come down to seventy-five cents per?"

"No 'seventy-five cents per' for me, Mrs. Yutzy. One dollar a visit."

"And nothin' docked off?"

"And nothing docked."

"Well, Doctor, if you ain't!"

"I 'll tell you what, Mrs. Yutzy — you don't owe me anything."

"*What* do you say?"

"Give me your bill. I'll receipt it — if you feel you can't afford to pay it."

She drew back. "No, us we *pay* our bills, me and Mister. It ain't that I don't want fur to pay. I'm a honest person. Only I want you to dock off some. Doc Weitzel he always docks off and anyhow he don't charge more 'n —"

"I never dock. I'll *give* you the six dollars. You need not pay it."

"No, that ain't settlin' this thing to satisfaction. If you'll take four or four-fifty, then I'll call it settled to satisfaction and —"

"I really have not time to talk any more about it, Mrs. Yutzy."

He rose and took up his hat and medicine case. "I have a call to make tonight."

She continued to parley and not until he had walked to the door, did she most unwillingly hand over the six dollars. He was obliged to return to his desk and give her a receipt. But she went on talking and arguing all the way out to the gate.

"She'll keep her 'Mister' awake all night talking about it," grinned the doctor as his runabout whizzed him over the darkening roads past scattered farm-houses and an occasional country store, to his destination two miles away.

As he passed the comfortable home of his arch-enemy, Mike Goodman, he caught a momentary glimpse in the front parlor of a fair head bowed over a book by the lamp on the center table.

"The niece! Uses the parlor on week days. Against all precedent! How does she make them let her do it? Mike works the voters of the township and she works Mike, it seems. Yes, when I'm through with this roads business I must get myself on the school board. We must have the right sort of a teacher here. None of that Goodman breed!"

The novelty of his life in this Pennsylvania Dutch district was a constant exhilaration.

"To think of *me*," he wrote to a college friend, "who was ever suspicious of the reformer's role and who claimed that self-

righteousness must be nine-tenths of his make-up — out here playing the part myself! It was their damnably muddy roads that started me — and landed me (by the devious paths of local political graft) upon the truth that a doctor's work in a community, to be effective, has got to begin with the *soul* of that community. (Blamed if it does n't sound like Christian Science and the Emmanuel Movement!) It was *mud* that taught me that spiritual fact! Well, at all events, I assure you that I 'm having lots of fun out of it! There's only one thing — I get a bit lonesome sometimes and would give a good deal for a talk now and then over a pipe with you or any one else, man or woman, who spake with the tongue of my own world!"

CHAPTER III

MIKE GOODMAN, county politician and proprietor of a flour-mill, the most prosperous inhabitant of the township, walked into the dining-room where his wife was removing the chenille cover from the table to lay the cloth for supper.

The room, in addition to the "dining-room suite," contained a large round stove called the "Monarch," a haircloth sofa, two rocking-chairs and a sewing-machine. Its spotless cleanliness and cozy warmth on this chill autumn evening gave it an air of homelike comfort that was very grateful.

"Well, well!" Mike crowed, rubbing his hands together with snug satisfaction as he walked about between the Monarch and the table, "we 're got him fixed good! *Him* elected to the road-superwisors' board! He won't git a dozent wotes in this here whole township!"

Externally, Mike suggested so adequately what he was mentally and morally that had he been called upon to act the part in a play, no "make-up" would have been necessary. A bulldog scowl with the cunning of a cat stamped his features; the forward push of his fat, round head, the sinuous movements of his body, the ingratiating smirk that was his effort at smiling playfulness, were the marks set upon him and deepened by his career as unscrupulous political boss, and of secret social dissipations. Nevertheless, Mike was superintendent of the Sunday school; his neighbors esteemed him as a man of property and influence and as a useful citizen of the republic; and his wife thought him a good husband.

"Is it Doctor Thorpe you mean, Mike?" Mrs. Goodman quite superfluously inquired in her characteristically even and monotonous tone, her colorless personality manifest in every relaxed line of her limp, stout form. It would have been a close observer who would have detected in that mild, sleek countenance the faintly cruel obstinacy of the too-sweet mouth.

"Who *would* I mean?" Mike growled impatiently. "Don't be so dumn!"

His wife, looking meekly apologetic, continued her work of setting the table.

"I've been half over the township this afternoon," he said as he removed his hat and coat, "and not a man I talked to but passed me his promise he would n't wote fur Doctor Thorpe next Tuesday a week. 'A crank like him,' they says, 'that half the time won't give medicine when you 're willin' to pay fur it; tells folks to h'ist the windahs in a room where a feller 's layin' with pee-noomony; says folks ought to wash all over in *winter* time — yes, even babies yet! And that every one's house ought to be throwed open and aired good oncet a day anyhow!' Yes, Weesy, such dumn things like that he tells folks to do, and then thinks this here township's goin' to elect him road superwisor! Ain't it comic?"

"But mind you the dust that blows in when you open up!" Mrs. Goodman feebly argued against the doctor's heresies. "And every day yet! Ach, my souls! It

looks, Mike," she said with cunning suspicion, "like as if he wanted fur to get folks to do things that would make 'em sick, so 's he 'd have to go tend 'em. Mebby that 's the way he 's tryin' to work up a practice, ain't? *Don't* it look that way?"

"By gum, Weesy, you 've hit it!" Mike exclaimed excitedly. "That 's the best side-winner *yet* fur this here campaign! Gosh, won't I work it fur all there is in it! Weesy, you 're a politician!"

Weesy (her name was Louisa) looked mildly flattered, though puzzled. "But what do you mean, Mike?"

"*I 'll* show up his slick tricks — adwisin' folks to expose their constitootions so 's he kin git a practice — which he *can't* git by honest methods! See? To be sure, even if I did n't bother workin' ag'in him, he would n't git no wotes to speak of, so mad he's got the farmers with his old road-drag and his claimin' to know so much more about our roads than us that 's lived here all our lives! And," he added derisively, "with hardly a friend to his name and only about a week till election day, here he 's

goin' about sayin' he has as good as got the election *a'ready!* Golly, won't we have the laugh on him when them returns comes in next Tuesday! It 'll be the best fun I seen this good while back a'ready!"

And Mike guffawed as he went out to the kitchen to wash at the sink. In a few moments he returned, rubbing his head and face with a towel.

"Where 's Mollie? Why ain't she helpin' you with the supper? She 's home from her school, ain't she?"

"Yes, this good while a'ready. She 's in the parlor settin'."

"In the parlor settin'! Huh! I 'll tend to *that,* you bet you!"

He strode across the room, jerked open a door and stood glowering upon the occupant of the room beyond.

"Hello, hello, what 's this, what 's this? Settin' down to read a book and your Aunt Weesy gettin' supper!"

The girl seated by the window, looked up from her book, her eyes absent, unseeing; or rather, they had a look of being turned inward with an earnestness of at-

tention that left her blind to what was about her.

"Well?" demanded Mike roughly.

"Yes? — What, Uncle?"

"Are you deef or what? I sayed your Aunt Weesy's gettin' supper and you're settin' here readin'."

"If Aunt Louisa could study this civil government for me, I'd gladly get the supper for her. Of all unexciting things in earth or heaven, give me a public-school text-book on civil government!" She tossed the book across the room into a corner and sent her slipper flying off her foot after it. "Getting supper would be mad dissipation compared to the mental anguish of imbibing such dust as that! To think of being obliged to waste one's fair young life over that, when there are such things to read as Keats's poetry and George Eliot's novels! If I've got to teach that civil government, I'll resign and turn politician or evangelist, whichever pays best."

Her uncle roared with laughter as he strode across the room to her side and roughly attempted to caress her — but she

deftly eluded that by gliding from under his arm to go after her slipper; and he was not unmindful of her shrinking from his touch.

Never in all her heart-hungry childhood had he laid a hand upon her except in tyranny. It was only when the overworked and scrawny girl bloomed out unexpectedly into exquisite maidenhood, that his wife's niece became to him an object of such desire as to make him willing even to hinder her in the heavy work he demanded of her, to be held on his knee while he played with her hair, patted her shapely shoulders, kissed her delicate fair neck. To the girl's untutored intuition, this belated "affection" grew to be a torture so keen that to avoid it she developed a diplomacy which served her well in her later needs and struggles.

As always, her uncle resented her eluding him.

"Go 'long now and help your Aunt Weesy!" he gruffly commanded.

"Help Aunt Louisa?" she asked as she sat on the floor to tie her slipper. "I un-

derstand that I am to pay board here, Uncle Mike, now that I am teaching."

"To be sure you 're to pay board. The little bit of work you kin do out of school hours would n't pay fur keepin' you."

"But if I pay board I do no house work."

"Then I charge you more board yet!" he angrily exclaimed.

"I can get board at the hotel for what I have agreed to pay you and the hotel people won't ask me to get the supper."

"The hotelkeepers ain't your own aunt and uncle. Don't you owe no *duties* to them that raised you up since you was born a'ready? And you wantin' your Aunt Weesy to be a slave fur you and set your meals in the dining-room yet and you not turn your hand to help — you her own niece!"

"No need for any sentiment on the score of our relationship, Uncle Mike," she answered with unruffled good humor, "since it has always been a strictly pay-for-what-you-get arrangement between us, you know — as far back as I can remember; with the

advantage always to your account; you and Aunt Louisa took good care of that, Uncle!"

"That 's actin' like a daughter, ain't? — to them that raised you!" he reiterated his argument.

"Uncle Mike," she replied very quietly, "what one thing have you or Aunt Louisa ever done for me for which you have not charged me? For instance, to-day," she suddenly smiled, "Aunt Louisa made me give her ten cents for the use of her sewing-machine for a quarter of an hour; and forty cents for letting me drive to town with her in the buggy. I could have gone and come in the stage for twenty-five cents. So you see if I 'm to be treated strictly as a boarder, I must live up to it. I 'm perfectly willing to. I 'll pay you and Aunt Louisa for everything you give me. But I 'll charge you for what I give you, for I am poor and you are rich; a little richer than you would be if I had not always worked for you, and if," she added, rising from the floor, the steady level of her gaze making his own shift and waver, "you had not, unfortu-

nately for me, been the guardian of my small inheritance."

"You're a little feist, that's what you are!" he snapped at her. "You always was!"

"The one thing that you and Aunt Louisa must understand is that I don't mean any longer to be imposed upon — or bullied."

"Ach," he growled — but his wife's voice calling them both to supper put an end to their discussion.

The report of Mollie Graeff's reforms in the customs of her uncle's household had been greatly exaggerated, for she had been too wise to attempt to accomplish more than what she had come to deem a few essentials. It was only the greed of her aunt for the exorbitant board she paid that enabled the girl to exact the few comforts she had, for Mrs. Mike Goodman was, even in this Pennsylvania Dutch neighborhood, notorious for being "near."

But the pewter castor in the center of the supper table, the turned-down plates and goblets, the pie which must appear at every

meal of a Pennsylvania Dutch family, her uncle in his shirt sleeves putting his own knife into the butter — these and innumerable other things which tried Mollie, she knew could never be changed.

"Talkin' about manners," Mike discoursed while he ate, "in there at the doctor's trial last week, when we all went to the American House fur dinner, I seen that the doctor — that wants to be so much, mind you — acted so dumn with his napkin (they served napkins) and doctor he did n't seem to know what to do with hisn — like as if he was n't used to 'em; instead of tuckin' it at the end of his chin, did n't he lay it acrost his legs, mind you!"

"But here 's Mollie does the same," said her aunt; "her that wants to be so tony too."

"Too tony to help along with the extra work she makes!" muttered Mike. "Well," he added, "Susan Schnabel, now that she housekeeps fur the doctor, she gives it out that his table manners beats anything *she* ever seen! Mind you, he makes her fetch in such a little glass washbowl *to the table* after he 's through eating

all; not even as big, Susan says, as a soup plate yet. No soap nor towel with it, just clear water; and he don't rightly *wash;* just sticks in his fists and dries 'em off with a napkin. Yes, after every meal, that he must have! What do we want of such dood ways out here?" demanded Mike indignantly. "Say, Mollie!"

"Well, Uncle Mike?"

"I heard somethin' to-day!"

"Well?"

"It 's put out that the doctor 's tryin' to git on the school board to fill out the unexpired term of Jake Holzapple that died last week — so 's he kin put *you* off your job! — Holzapple's term expires just about the time the new superwisor takes his office. Susan Schnabel she 's gave it out that he says he 's a-goin' to fight the mud in this here township, moral and physical, till it 's a clean enough place to live in! — and that he don't want none of 'that bad Goodman breed' teachin' in our school! What do you think of that, heh? I 'll *lick* that feller if he don't watch out!"

"Oh!" Mollie turned a pale and startled

face to her uncle. "But why," she said breathlessly, "should he want to persecute *me?* Oh! I've worked so hard, so awfully hard, to get this school! — I am so —"

"Yi, yi, yi!" her uncle checked her; "*he* can't do you nothin'. He'll no more be appointed to the school board than he will git elected to the road-superwisors' board."

"But you were sure he was going to lose his case in court last week, and he won!" Mollie almost wailed.

"That's somethin' different again. That there jury was made up of a lot of dumn towners that could n't see through *nothin'!*"

"But he seems to be a man of such ferocious energy and determination!" — she was not wholly reassured. "And I suppose he does hate you, Uncle Mike, enough to want to destroy everything connected with you!"

"He does that, all right!" laughed Mike, his mouth full of fried potato.

"But what a poor creature the man must be," Mollie speculated impersonally, though she still looked startled and worried, "to

want to fight you through your defenseless female niece!"

"Yes, ain't!" nodded Mike.

"I only hope he *will* be defeated; at least until I've saved enough here to get to college."

"College yet!" sneered Mike; "and you a female!"

"I never conceited I was raisin' her to be such a high flyer!" Mrs. Goodman shook her head dolefully.

"If," Mollie suddenly suggested, looking tragic, "Doctor Thorpe *should* get on the school board and should ever come to the school to hear me teach civil government! — oh! he'd have reason to put me out — for what I don't know about the subject!"

"I guess you know enough to teach anybody 'round these here parts," her uncle consoled her.

"Not enough civil government, Uncle Mike," she sighed as she glanced at her watch. "Your news has taken away my appetite, so I might as well go in and tackle the old thing again."

"Ach, Mollie," her aunt reproved her,

"I tole you often a'ready not to be always takin' your gold watch in and out, it wears it so!"

"Don't you go settin' down to your book before the supper dishes is through all!" her uncle commanded her.

"Yes, I guess anyhow not!" added her aunt.

"If my being here really does make too much work for you, Aunt Louisa, I can go to the hotel; or Uncle Mike can get a maid."

"You mean you won't do it to help along?"

"Certainly I 'll help — for my board, or for part of it."

"No," said her aunt, "if it comes to that, I might as well do the extry work and have the money."

"Then excuse me, please." And Mollie, ignoring her uncle's angry muttering at her obstinacy, rose and left the table.

But at the door she turned. "Oh, Uncle Mike?"

"What then?" he returned sulkily.

"When does the election come off?"

"You know well enough; next Tuesday

a week. And fur all his braggin' that he 'll git elected, he ain't got no more chanct —"

"No, no. I don't mean the election for road supervisor. For school director?"

"Next Tuesday night. But he won't get elected to that neither. You need n't worry."

Mollie, getting her book from the parlor, went thoughtfully upstairs to her own bedchamber.

CHAPTER IV

HER uncle's assertion that she had always been "a little feist" was not wholly unjustifiable. Had she not occasionally been "a feist," she would, under his conscientious efforts to assist Providence in making of her that which Mike earnestly believed all women were born to be, have grown up into a dull and spiritless household drudge, with no ambition other than to make comfortable that portion of the male creation committed to her care.

It was when she had reached the age of thirteen and was told her schooling was finished, that for the first time she turned upon her two oppressors; for the quiet obstinacy in her aunt's character, as well as her "closeness" with money, had been scarcely less of a menace to the girl's free development than had her uncle's actual brutality. Mollie had "fought like a cat"

for permission to continue to go to school. It was not that at that early age she had any real appreciation of the value of an education. What drove her to her frenzied rebellion was that only at school could she have access to books, there being no books but the Bible at her uncle's; and books, she had early discovered, were the breath of her life. In the monotony of the unbroken drudgery of the summer vacations, with nothing whatever to feed the passionate hunger of a very active and eager brain, her starved mind developed a restlessness that nearly maddened her. To have these vacations from school prolonged without break through life — she could not face it.

But she had to pay very dearly for the grudging permission given her, in the added work laid upon her young shoulders.

"I leave you keep on goin' to school if you git up in time Mondays to help with the wash before you go," her uncle had stipulated, "and do the ironin' and sweepin' after school hours. Your aunt can't do it alone and I ain't *hirin'*, with a big girl like you hangin' 'round the place. No, sir!"

She had promised to "work her fingers to the bone" if only he would let her go. He had taken her so entirely at her word that he had actually put her to lifting heavy grain sacks at his mill which stood across the road from his house, until the widespread scandal of the neighborhood obliged him to stop it.

It was two years later in her fifteenth year that Mollie had accidentally come upon the knowledge that her father had left her a small inheritance, of which little remained, because of the inroads her uncle had made upon it to pay himself for boarding and clothing her, though the lash with which he had always goaded her to her heavy tasks had been to remind her of his wonderful generosity in providing her with a home.

The discovery that money had been left to her, together with the girl's deepening discontent in her environment and her growing ambition had lent to her, young as she was, an intrepidity before which her uncle had been sufficiently cowed to yield to her demand that what was left of her

money be spent in sending her to the near-by Normal school, an institution which in Mollie's eyes at that time represented the highest pinnacle of learning to which a mortal might aspire. Closer acquaintance with the institution had given her another point of view.

Indeed, the process by which she had come to a new point of view in all her relations to life had been a very revolutionary one. It had been the intimacy which had quickly sprung up between herself and the daughter of the professor of English at the Normal school, that had educated her far beyond anything she gleaned from text-books. So close and warm had this friendship grown that Mollie soon became almost like another daughter to the parents of her friend; and as they were people of a quality not commonly met with in an institution of this sort, it had been for Mollie a strenuous experience learning to comprehend even vaguely their new and strange plane of life; learning to adapt herself to the atmosphere of their cultured home without jarring upon it; and to assimilate its gracious

spirit — she who had never known the meaning of graciousness.

But she had been swift to learn. Intellectually and emotionally her whole being had responded to what was held out to her. During those four years away from her home, in closest touch with people of rare fineness, she had lived with an intensity that had carried her very far from the place at which she had started.

Once, in the bewilderment of her new and deep experiences, it had dawned upon her with a strange wonder, that through sixteen years of her life these great things of existence, the things that lifted human beings above the beasts — friendships, music, poetry, pictures, novels, the theater, the charms of social intercourse — had been non-existent so far as she was concerned.

"What I have missed! Oh! What I have missed!" she passionately lamented. "I've lived the life of a vegetable!"

But Professor Moore would never let her take a pessimistic view. "Bitterness is a canker in the mind. Root it out and keep the soil healthy for what's worth cultivat-

ing. You 've not had music, poetry, art, society? But, Mollie, life is not so unjust. It 's all been stored up there within you, ready to bloom as soon as it was brought into the sun and air!"

"But suppose it had never been brought into the sun and air?"

"It would have found its way. It always does."

And so Mollie on this autumn evening, sitting in her cozy, dainty bedchamber, her books and a few choice pictures (gifts of the Moores) about her — occupied in forcing herself to master the uninteresting details and intricacies of our civil government as set forth in a text-book — belonged essentially, not to the environment of her uncle's home, but to that through which she had so earnestly forged out all that gave to her life any meaning and worth.

Naturally, with this evolution of her mind and spirit, the girl's whole physical being had developed along a line that it might not have taken under other circumstances; the new fineness of her taste and feelings

was reflected in her countenance, in her whole bearing, manner and dress; the earnestness of her lovely young face gave her a look of distinction that many a shallow beauty at the school had noted with mystified envy. Mollie Graeff had moved among her mates with a notable preëminence.

She had learned, in her better experiences, to be conscious of and to regret the streak of hardness that her somber childhood had engendered in her. Sne cherished with jealous care the softening affection of the friends who had so helped her, knowing well that this leaven was the salvation of her otherwise lost soul; for had she not loved these friends, she would have hated her foster parents, and hate reads damnation. Upon this little leaven of love, however, she could rise to an indifference to her wrongs that recognized the not-worth-whileness of avoidable misery and the possibility of extracting blessedness from any environment whatsoever.

As she had gone on studying at the Normal school until her money was exhausted,

she had rejoiced at securing the Webster Township school, through which she hoped to save enough money to get a year at college or a course at the summer school of some university. Molly was not inordinately fond of study. She could say with Lowell that she loved all books but college text-books and she had too much imagination not to crave the leisure for floating upon it to fields Elysian, rather than the incessant striving against the tide, which was her lot. But work and study were her only means of escape from the sort of life she was determined not to live — and so she worked and studied.

"The one demoralizing thing about my life here now," she wrote to Anna Moore, "is that in order to hold my own and not be crushed and jaded to death, I have to be so selfish! If my aunt loved me, if there were not the constant necessity for my resisting their unconquerable tendency to take advantage of me, if there could be a spirit of mutual helpfulness — how much happier I would be and how much more normal! It is hideous, this fighting for one's

bare existence; or it would be so if I let it. I keep it external from me as much as I can, and meantime try to practise the grace of unselfishness upon the school children.

"There is a lot of gossip in the neighborhood about how 'proud' I've grown! That's because I refuse to board at my uncle's unless I can live as decently as I could at the hotel, where I would n't pay any more board than Uncle Mike demands. You see my uncle is very well off and there is no reason why we should live like savages. I might submit if they had ever given me one jot of a reason for sacrificing myself for their convenience. But as they have always used me for their own ends, I don't hesitate now to exact my money's worth. But think of living in such an atmosphere of tension, of jealous care lest you be 'done' by those who ought to be nearest to you! How glad I shall be, Anna, when I can get away from it all forever — if that time ever comes! But come it will, it must!

"The country about here is so beautiful! — how I could have learned to love it if it had not always been associated with the

heart-hunger and the bitterness of my life! So much so that try as I will, I can't disassociate it. And so, I should find my present circumstances pretty stultifying if it were not for the solace of books and of your letters. I can hear your dear father telling me that no mere circumstances need be stultifying; that stultification comes from a deadness within; that richness of life may be gleaned from any conditions, however meager or crude.

"Yes, by a very strong character, no doubt. But that is what I fear I am not. Any way, I am weak enough to suffer horribly from loneliness, away from you all! I believe if I have a talent for anything it 's for friendship — I am by nature such a friendly, social being, Anna! And out here there is n't a living being to hold converse with on my own natural plane; especially as they 've learned to look upon me as 'proud.' Gracious! How I ache to have you here for just five minutes as a safety-valve for my pent-up feelings!"

The thing which to-night made it more than usually hard for Mollie to fix her

thoughts upon civil government, was the dread possibility suggested by her Uncle Mike that she might lose her school through the antagonism of "the fighting doctor," as the people called him. If so determined an individual *should* get on the board — with his evidently fierce dislike of her uncle!

"Just as if," she mentally groaned, feeling weary and discouraged before this new and formidable obstacle in her path, "I had not enough to contend with, without being made the scape-goat for Uncle Mike's political idiosyncrasies! Why can't that ridiculous 'fighting doctor' confine his bullying to people of his own size? He must be a very small individual indeed to take Uncle Mike so seriously as to want to fight him and his whole family!"

CHAPTER V

"IF it ain't Doctor Thorpe hisself!" cried Mrs. Butz, quickly closing the shutter through which she had peeped and turning to her husband who, at the sound of an automobile stopping at their gate, had curiously, though more slowly, followed his wife's flying haste to the front of the house.

"Gosh! You 're jollyin', ain't you?" he demanded, incredulous and amazed.

"Don't you hear fur yourself his old ottomobile thumpin' out there?"

"Well, honest to gosh!"

"Yes, I think!"

"What fur would he come *here* yet?"

"Yes, *anyhow!*"

"And only three days till election a'ready! He sure ain't got the cheek to come here astin' *me* to wote fur him fur road superwisor!"

"Cheek enough fur any old thing, *he's* got, Aaron!"

"But, Meely, he knows how I 'm workin' ag'in him and standin' in with Mike Goodman. Not that he 'd have any chances anyhow — spitin' the farmers the way he does with that dinged old road-drag of hisn! But if it don't beat all, his comin' to *me!* Well, I 'll wander out to see what he wants off of me. Whatever it is, it 's what he won't git!"

As Doctor Thorpe, in duster and cap, jumped out of his car and walked up the garden path to the porch of the tightly closed farm-house (made as nearly air tight as possible to exclude dust), Aaron Butz, a brawny, dull-looking man, clad only in shirt and trousers, a dirty old felt hat on the back of his head, strolled leisurely from around the house with an air of such elaborate and self-betraying indifference that the doctor recognized at a glance his state of inflamed curiosity concerning this naturally inexplicable visit.

Butz was a well-to-do, retired farmer, whose too great leisure had become a prolific

source of mischief, having led him to tie himself up in a strong political partnership to the fortunes of his neighbor, Mike Goodman; a partnership which had long proved mutually profitable.

"Good morning," Thorpe nodded curtly. "You 're the secretary of the board of road supervisors, I believe?"

"You 'believe'!" Butz drawled sarcastically, bristling with antagonism. "You bet you do!"

"Then I will trouble you, if you please, to let me inspect your books."

Aaron stared. "Huh! Inspect my books yet! Well, well, try another, stranger!"

"As a taxpayer of the township, I have a legal right to see your accounts. You are aware of that. Any taxpayer may at any time inspect the records of the expenditures made by the township's officers. So I will trouble you."

"Huh! But I ain't so easy troubled."

"Without any delay. I am very busy today."

"Busy with mindin' other people's busi-

ness, ain't? Yes, us we all know how busy you are with *that.* But you ain't mindin' to *my* business, I kin tell you! I kin take care of it without your help. Leastways I always have did so before you come, so I guess I kin worry through till a little while longer yet. See?"

"Not very much longer, Mr. Butz, without my help. I mean to see your books this morning. I stand on my rights as a taxpayer, you know."

"May I inqu'ar what you want to see them books *fur?*"

"Merely to learn what, in God's name, is *done* with the money paid into the treasury for road-repairing. That's all."

"And blab it out to the woters, ain't?" Aaron exclaimed injudiciously.

"Exactly. You 've got my idea."

"If you was any account as a doctor, you 'd be too busy to be buttin' into politics!"

"Fortunately I 'm not too busy to take a careful look at your books this morning."

"Now you don't say! Unfortunately I ain't got time this morning, neighbor, to

trot 'em out. So," said Aaron, turning away and taking a step towards the house, "we 'll say good-by."

"When I 've seen your books."

"Good-by, Doc. Come again when you ain't got so much time to waste."

"Very well. I will. Within an hour, Mr. Butz. I shall not need to waste time, for I shall bring an officer with me. Good-by. Within an hour."

He turned at once to go down the walk.

"Hi, there!" Aaron stopped him.

"Well? Be quick with what you 've got to say — if it needs to be said."

Aaron laughed, though he looked "ugly" (as his wife was wont to describe that particular expression which now came over his face).

"Ain't you the wind-bag though! You 'll fetch an officer yet! Well, anyhow! You must think you 're Teddy Roosevelt, and kin run Webster Township like he runs this here United States of America! But you *ain't* Teddy Roosevelt, mind you. That 's the thing we 're a-goin' to learn you next Tuesday at the election!"

"It might be well for you to bear in mind," said the doctor, drawing on his glove, "that I managed to win my case over you fellows in the Lebanon County courts; and to get appointed last night, to your school board to fill out Holzapple's term. Maybe I can manage a few more things."

"The school board ain't the road-superwisors' board, by a thunderin' long sight! And you would n't have made even the school board at no reg'lar election. This here was an *appointment.* Nor you would n't of made even *that* if the county superintendent had n't of been a friend of yourn and bullied the farmers on the board into thinkin' you 'd adwance the Cause of Education because you was college educated yourself."

"If," returned the doctor, "you 're not going to show your books without being made to show them, I 'm going. Well?"

"You 're the first person yet," affirmed Aaron, growing sullenly angry and evidently very uneasy, "that ever come here with such a crazy, impoodent request since I was

secretary of the road-superwisors' board a'ready!"

"Most of the voters and taxpayers don't even know that they have the right to inspect the books which record what use is made of their money. But they are going to know it, Mr. Butz; and this township is going to have good roads — and no mud. Good morning."

"Here, then!" again Mr. Butz stopped him with a growl.

"You give in?"

"You wait here till I go over to the *ho*tel and 'phone to Mike Goodman to see oncet what *he's* got to say."

"He has absolutely nothing to do with the case and I won't wait another minute. Your books! — or I bring an officer and take them."

"This here," thought Aaron, as thus coerced he surrendered and led the way into the house, his anxiety and rage oddly mixed with a sneaking admiration, "is the way he does it, then, ain't? — just keeps on tuggin' till he lands his fish *whether* or no! Huh!"

An hour later, the doctor having departed,

a small note-book filled with memoranda tucked into his inner breast-pocket, Aaron, with rather heavy misgivings, wended his way to "the mill" to talk things over with his fellow citizen, Mike Goodman.

"What 'll Mike think, anyhow, of somethin' like this? Don't it, now, beat all! Comin' to my own house yet and bullyin' me into leavin' him see my own accounts just two days before the election comes off fur road superwisors! Gosh! I must be dreamin' when I think I *showed* 'em to him! Mike 'll be hot! But I could n't git out of it. Leastways, I don't see *how* I could. I 'd of left him go *bring* an officer, but it might of got into the county noospapers, and then what would be to pay! It might of lost us the election yet! I don't see as he got much, anyhow, out of them records of ourn."

He fell to wondering, as he passed the schoolhouse in which Mollie Graeff was teaching, how the Goodmans were feeling over the doctor's appointment to the school board.

"It won't go long till he gits Mollie put

off her job! He kin easy do it too, the president of the board bein' Mike's enemy and on the doctor's side in this here fight fur good roads. Yes, Mollie she has the right to worry fur her job!" was Aaron's conclusion as he reached the mill. "Full much so!"

CHAPTER VI

IT was the next day that Mollie, on her way to school, read the type-written communication which that morning had been received by her Uncle Mike and by every voting citizen of Webster Township — a communication which had excited her uncle to such a frenzy of animosity, not to say alarm, that he had gone forth from his house with the affirmation that not until he had "licked" that meddler, mischief-maker and general public nuisance, Doctor Thorpe, would he return.

"You better watch out!" his wife had anxiously warned him; "fur they say he 's awful powerful when it comes to usin' his fists!"

"Yes," Mollie nodded, as she contemplated this masterstroke of diplomacy on the part of Doctor Thorpe, "I think he must be merely a vulgar politician, posing

as a serious reformer. This sensational circular proves it!"

She shrugged contemptuously as she read it, though she had to admit its cleverness.

To the Voters of Webster Township:

If you wish to know how your money is spent by your officers, you may find recorded in your Secretary's books the fact that in the recent trial of Doctor Thorpe, all those witnesses who testified against the use of the road-drag, were paid *out of the township funds.* The sixty dollars fee to the lawyer who handled the case for the supervisors board was also paid from the township funds. One hundred dollars of your money expended by political grafters to defeat the cause of good roads in your community! For half the sum now wasted in graft your roads could be kept, with the use of the inexpensive King road-drag, in good condition for every kind of travel. Doctor Thorpe's election to the board will insure an honest use of the funds and *good roads.*

"He could take no surer way," thought Mollie, "of rousing the township against Uncle Mike and the rest of the board than this appeal to their Pennsylvania Dutch thrift. And once convince the invincibly honest Mennonites of the township that

there is the least crookedness in the dealings of the board, and that board is doomed! Well, the man had some ground for his boast (which seemed to me so futile as to be weak-minded) that he would be elected next Tuesday!"

She sighed in deep discouragement as she realized her own precarious position now that this formidable enemy of her uncle with his openly avowed antagonism to herself as teacher had been appointed to the school board.

A turn in the road brought her to the "general store," which was also the post-office, where to her alarm she found that she had come upon an excited crowd, the center of which was her Uncle Mike confronting aggressively a tall, broad-shouldered man in linen duster and motor-cap.

"I'll kick hell out of you if you don't mind to your own business!" her uncle was shouting.

"I am minding my own business, Mike. As a doctor it's my business to make this township a wholesome place!" returned Thorpe with brisk cheerfulness.

"What 's your game anyhow? — what are you *after?* That 's what us peaceable citizens would like to know!"

"My 'game' is to loosen your grip on the township treasury!" the doctor distinctly and fearlessly stated in the face of the crowd about them.

"I say," shouted Mike. "I 'll sue you for libel!"

"You won't get far on that line — not while the records of the secretary of the supervisors board show up the facts I saw there yesterday. Open to inspection," he addressed the crowd, "to all citizens!"

"I tell you I 'll knock hell out of you if you don't leave me be!"

"I 'm not going to let you be. So, do it now," said the doctor, standing motionless.

"You say another word ag'in me 'round here where I 'm respected like you never will be — and you look out!"

"All right, I 'll say it right now. You 're a scoundrel, Mike. So come ahead and try it on."

Oh, *why*, thought Mollie, had her uncle

been so short-sighted as to get himself into such a fix! — for he could not fight. He was a coward at heart, as every man is who bullies women and children. He controlled men by his cunning, but never in all his life, she was sure, had he stood up fearlessly to a man. And a man like this awful doctor!

"No," growled Mike, "I ain't a-goin' to fight you now! But you just wait! You just —"

"If you're not going to do it now, stand aside and let me pass. And another day don't block my path; I might be obliged to knock you down."

With which, the doctor, pushing through the crowd to his automobile in the road, accidentally laid his hand, with no light touch, upon Mollie's shoulder — and instantly realizing, before seeing her, that he had pushed aside a woman, he turned with a quick apologetic lifting of his cap. For a brief instant their eyes met, his with a questioning surprise, hers with a melancholy consideration of him as she slightly inclined her head in acknowledgment of his apology;

she was the first to move on, his surprised and puzzled glance following her for a moment before he went out to his car.

Mollie was too intelligent not to understand that look of puzzled surprise.

"As who should say, 'Who the devil *is* she?' Well, I am not more startlingly different from anything one would expect to see in Daniel Webster Township than he is himself. Only, I being the niece and foster-daughter of the poor wretch he had just invited to 'Come ahead and try it on'; and being the 'mud' he means to get rid of, now he is a school director —"

Mollie bit her lip to check a rising sob.

"If he did guess who I was, no doubt he was more surprised than ever. Expected me to look like a smaller edition of Uncle Mike, I suppose, judging from the way he talks all over the township about its being an injury to the children to have a 'Goodman' for their teacher!"

She had to admit that the sight of him this morning had modified the impression his circular had made upon her. Even if he were a mere vulgar politician, he was un-

questionably a man and, unless his appearance was most misleading, a gentleman.

"All the same he must be a poor, cheap creature — if he is going to let personal spite make him try to drive from Webster Township a far better teacher, I am sure, than they ever had here!"

It seemed indeed an untoward fate that chose that very morning, of all times, for an occasion to arise which must give the new school director the chance which the whole township seemed to know he desired, to replace Mollie Graeff with a teacher of his own selection.

This chance came in the open rupture which took place between Mollie and the school bully, Jake Schmidt, who, as ill luck would have it, was the son of the school board's president, the only man on the board who was an avowed enemy of her Uncle Mike and a follower of Doctor Thorpe.

Mollie had, from the first day of her teaching, foreseen difficulties in this quarter and as she was passionately anxious to keep her position, she had "gone softly" in her dealings with the burly, seventeen-year-old

clown whose sole idea of his business at school was to torment small boys and defy the young woman in authority over him.

His father had strongly opposed her election and had been greatly chagrined at the school's being given to his enemy's niece. Now that his opposition was reinforced by Doctor Thorpe's, her pupil, Jacob Schmidt, held her in the hollow of his hand; and she knew that he knew it.

To-day, however, he overstepped the limit of her forbearance. All the morning she had patiently borne with his extraordinary stupidity; as for instance, his persistent failure to understand her explanation in physics of why a glass cracked in hot water, his only response to the question, after repeated elucidations on her part, being the sullen statement, "It gits so hot it's *got* to bust"; she had only sighed deeply at his assertion in the history class that Congress had power to suppress "resurrections" and that Abe Lincoln was dead, having been killed at a moving picture show; and she had refrained from either laughter or tears

when he had hazarded that the cause of the Pope's displeasure on the occasion of Mr. Roosevelt's recent visit to Rome was the colonel's trying to replace the Roman Catholic Pontiff with a Protestant pope. All these were things she could not only endure and overlook, but even find drearily enjoyable.

But when, in the course of the morning, suddenly upon the quiet of the schoolroom Jake's coarse voice had risen in an angry and wholly unfounded accusation of theft against the one Negro who attended the school, a little girl of thirteen, Mollie knew that the crisis had come.

"They 's two dimes cheated out of my toot!" he bawled, rising at his desk and holding up an envelope containing some money. "I had three dimes in this here toot and here 's only one yet! It 's that nigger, Eva Johnson, took it, I bet you!"

Instantly "Miss Mollie" was on her feet, her face flushed, her eyes sparkling.

"And you bet," he cried before Mollie could speak, "she 's got to give it back, or I 'll lick her till she does!"

"Eva Johnson, will you come to the platform?"

Eva, the whites of her eyes showing large with fright, rose and obeyed, while Mollie distinctly felt the quiver of indignant protest against what appeared like an outrageous favoritism towards Jake Schmidt, in thus haling forth the accused unheard, which ran over the school.

Eva, by the time she reached Mollie's side, was shaking with crying.

"I did n't cheat no money out of his toot, Miss Mollie!"

"Jacob, come to the platform," Mollie commanded.

The youth, thinking as a matter of course that the game was his, obeyed readily.

"Now, then," said Mollie when the two were before her, "let us hear your reason, Jacob, for accusing Eva Johnson, before the school, of taking your money."

"Whether I have reason? Ain't it a reason enough that I brang three dimes to school in this here toot and now there 's only one in it — and a nigger sittin' in the seat behind me?"

Mollie, holding herself in hand with difficulty, appealed to the school. "Can any one give any account of the disappearance of Jacob's dimes?"

There was no response, and not a sound broke the breathless expectancy of the school.

"Then, Jacob, you have no witnesses and no proofs?" she inquired.

"I got proofs a-plenty. The dimes was there and then they *was n't* there — and niggers is all thiefs — anybody knows that."

"Very well," Mollie turned squarely upon the big skulking creature before her. "Jacob Schmidt, you have, without the least shadow of proof, publicly accused a schoolmate of theft and openly insulted her. You will as openly acknowledge your mistake; and very humbly apologize to Eva Johnson — and to the school and to me."

An instant's absolute silence met this unexpected turn — when suddenly, like a pistol shot, an outburst of applause broke upon the room, loud and enthusiastic, which continued until Mollie raised her hand to stop it.

"We are ready to hear you," she announced to Jacob.

"Ha!" he laughed. "Ha, ha! See me apologize to a nigger! Ha!"

"Instantly! Or walk out of this room. And until you are ready to stand on this platform and do as I tell you to do, you do not come back."

"Who 'll keep me away, heh?" he asked jeeringly — and the pertinence of the question was appreciated by even the youngest child in the school.

"Very well," Mollie responded, "if I am not able to put you out of my school, at least I shall not hear you recite until you have made a public apology to Eva Johnson, to me and to the school."

"When I apologize to a nigger it 'll be a cold day!"

"Then you are suspended until you obey me. Eva," Mollie turned and spoke gently to the little girl, "you may go to your seat."

As the child obeyed, Mollie, ignoring the great fellow on the platform, seated herself at her desk and proceeded with her work.

Jacob, for a moment at a loss, after an

instant's consideration of his awkward situation, stalked down the aisle and defiantly took his seat.

Throughout the remainder of the morning, Mollie continued to ignore him. When his class in arithmetic was called he presented himself with the rest, but she acted as though he were not there.

She reflected during the noon recess as she walked home, that Jacob's father would not only uphold and applaud him in his insubordination; he would be outraged at his son's being ordered by Mike Goodman's niece to apologize to "a nigger"—and if Jake, continuing in his defiance, came back that afternoon and she should persist in her course of ignoring him and refusing to teach him, Mr. Schmidt would, with Doctor Thorpe's assistance, eagerly seize the opportunity to work her out of her place. All this she realized and her heart was heavy with foreboding.

Nevertheless, upon Jake's aggressively presenting himself at the afternoon session, she did not waver in the least in the course she had undertaken. Nor did her resolu-

tion falter when he appeared again the next morning, although she had received, upon calling at the post-office on her way to school, a summons signed by the president of the board, to appear before the assembled school directors that night at eight-thirty o'clock sharp, at the office of Doctor Thorpe, to answer complaints made against her objectionable methods of discipline.

CHAPTER VII

DOCTOR THORPE'S evening consulting hours were over and the school board had begun to assemble in his large back office, three of the six members being already gathered about the cheerful open fire, bending forward to warm their rough hands after their long drive in the chill autumn night.

The doctor, seated apart at his desk, was thoughtfully considering these three "grave and reverend signiors," who were all Mennonites, one Old Mennonite and two New Mennonites, clad in the priest-like garb of their faith, the New Mennonite costume being a bit more "plain" than the old. All three of them had been converted by the doctor's circular from the strongest antagonism to him and his road reforms, to an equal antagonism against Mike Goodman and his followers. Nothing save a convincing ap-

peal to their "Dutch" thrift and Mennonite honesty could so have changed their prejudiced attitude.

"It certainly is some muddy out, ain't?" remarked the Old Mennonite member, looking ruefully at the dirt his boots were depositing on the doctor's floor.

"Out West where I went last winter to wisit my brother Abe, the mud's mostly black," returned the New Mennonite conversationally. "But here in Webster Township it 's most any color, ain't?"

"Yes, ain't!"

"You begun soon, Doctor — ain't? — to git after Mollie Graeff? The wery day after you 're appointed a'ready!" the other New Mennonite remarked curiously.

"It 's not I that am 'after' her. This is Schmidt's case."

"But it looks some as if you was havin' a hand in it too, when you 're anyhow havin' us meet here at your place to try her!"

"Schmidt arranged that too — with my consent of course."

"I guess," nodded one of the New Mennonites knowingly, "you and Schmidt un-

derstands pretty good what you 're plannin' together."

"I don't even know what the row's about."

"And you did n't wait to find out neither," grinned the member, "before lendin' a hand to oust her ain't?"

"I consented to let the board meet here because there 's illness at the hotel. Can any of you tell me what it 's all about?"

"Well, you 've got a good case ag'in her, so far forth as that goes. It seems," the Old Mennonite volunteered to inform him, "that Mollie she sassed Jakey Schmidt in front of the whole school and made the scholars clap her yet; to be sure Mollie she 'd be only too glad of a chanct to spite Jakey when his pop 's workin' so hard ag'in her Uncle Mike and *fur* you. So she would n't hear Jakey say his lessons all day. Just left him set; and would n't learn him nothin'. To be sure Jake's pop ain't takin' *that* off of her — her refusin' to learn Jakey when that 's what this here board pays her fur doin'."

"Of course not," responded the doctor. "Has the girl no common sense?"

"You see, her goin' to Kutztown Normal got her so proud," explained the member. "I guess we made a mistake when we gev her our school. She don't make herself common enough."

"But one thing," the less talkative member feebly came to her defense, "if she ain't nice and common like some, I took notice a'ready when I seen her on comp'ny, she 's honest when she speaks — she don't speak things just to please the folks."

"If she really wants the school," speculated the doctor, "one would think she would act with a little more diplomacy in dealing with 'Jakey'— the son of the president of the board. Not to mention her extraordinary ideas of her duties! — refusing to teach one of her pupils; out of 'spite' as you put it. We want another sort of teacher altogether! Not a mere chit of a girl who regards her position only as a means of acquiring more blouses and other finery! We ought not to have a native of the township at all in our school. In any

community it is always better to utilize the teaching posts for bringing in fresh, outside life. Now if we could get a really cultured city woman here, what a leaven it might be in the whole life of the neighborhood!"

"Yes, well, *but!*" the New Mennonite remarked dubiously.

"Mike Goodman he's got his troubles with her too," said the Old Mennonite, "with her bein' so high-minded that way and havin' sich tony ways."

"In any case," said the doctor conclusively, "this girl must do her work properly or be removed."

"To be sure we all know you're ag'in her," nodded the Old Mennonite.

"Here they come!" announced a member, at the sound of the outer door's opening; and the doctor rose and stood by his desk as they filed in — Jacob Schmidt, Senior, Hiram Unger, Sam Spatz, and demurely bringing up the rear, the maiden, young and fair, for whose trial they were assembled.

"So *she* is Mollie Graeff," thought the doctor, a bit startled as he recognized the

girl he had yesterday encountered for an instant before the post-office — just after humiliating her uncle in the presence of their neighbors! It had seemed to him, then, impossible that a young woman who looked like that should belong to Webster Township.

He felt a faint amusement in noting how the lovely coloring of her youthful head mocked the sober apparel she had evidently thought befitting this grim occasion.

He stepped forward to place a chair for her comfortably near the fire.

"Allow me," he said with grave courtesy, turning the chair away from the glare of the light.

"Thank you." With the utmost self-possession she seated herself, her manner so entirely neutral that he was taken aback. He had expected to find the damsel either tearful or brazen; abashed or defiant. But she bore herself with a grace and ease one would certainly not look for in a poor little county school teacher haled for judgment before a lot of bucolic "Dutch" farmers. Was she, then, so indifferent to her fate?

— or so cock-sure of winning out against the Schmidts? Her composed demeanor gave him no clue.

"No doubt she thinks she can work the board as she works her uncle!" thought the doctor, grimly determining that if so, she should discover her mistake.

This manner of Mollie's, however, if he had only known it, was wholly affected. She was, in truth, half wild with anxiety for her position and was with difficulty keeping her teeth from chattering. It was her fear of showing how abject she felt that lent her her air of unnatural calm and dignity.

As Doctor Thorpe again seated himself apart at his desk, resting his elbow on the lid and his forehead on his fingers, Mollie felt his wary scrutiny of her; and in her fear, she felt that she hated him in his strength and security.

The president now "took the chair"; and the meeting being called to order, Mr. Schmidt announced that before attending to the special matter for which the board was assembled, there were a few other

things they might use this occasion to settle. For instance, he understood that Jonas Herr had a proposition he wished to present to the board.

Jonas Herr rose to make his proposition, which was that the board should vote to shorten the school term.

"Seven months they want us to spare our children to go to school! It 's too much, I say. We need 'em at home more. Five months fur school would be a plenty."

"But," Hiram Unger rose to object,' "most of us would like the term longer yet. Seven months — it 's too little out the whole year fur education."

"Yes, well, but I can't anyhow spare my boys till harvestin' is done a'ready," answered Jonas, "so why fur should I have to pay taxes fur seven months when I can't leave 'em go but only five? Shorten the term and you ain't got so much taxes to pay. Why, look at the taxes we got to pay! — property tax, road tax, dog tax, school tax! It 's too much!" he argued with heat.

"A hard enough fight we had to *git* our seven months' term!" Hiram said with some indignation. "This here township is fur progress, not fur back-slidin'."

Hiram's sentiment on the subject being that of the other members, Jonas failed to carry his point.

This matter being disposed of, as also a few small business items, Mr. Schmidt at length rose to explain that the special object of the meeting to-night was to decide whether Webster Township school board wished to retain a teacher who "out of spite" refused for two days to hear a pupil recite and held him up before the whole school for ridicule.

"Neither on his book nor on the blackboard would she leave our Jakey recite!" complained Jacob's father.

"And what fur a reason, yet, does she anyhow give fur such behavior?" asked Sam Spatz.

"Her reason being," Mr. Schmidt indignantly explained, "that our Jake he would n't do it to apologize before the whole school to a *nigger!*"

"Well, I guess anyhow not!" said Jonas Herr.

"Yes, that would be, now, too much to ask!" added Hiram Unger.

"The nigger she stole a couple dimes off of Jake's desk and when he was tryin' to make her give it back, teacher she butted in and called Jakey up before the whole school and sayed now he 'd apologize or go home; and when he would n't do neither the one *nor* the other, then she would n't learn him yet! Members of the board!" said the elder Schmidt oratorically, "you now have the facs. You dare now proceed to act on 'em."

Mr. Schmidt sat down, and after a moment Sam Spatz arose.

"To be sure we ain't makin' a white scholar apologize to no black one, fur all we don't uphold to slavery nor to showin' partiality. But *apologizin'*— that 's somethin' else ag'in. Therefore, it 's wery plain that we can't keep no teacher that asks such things as them off of a scholar and refuses to learn him yet. I don't see no way to settle this here thing but to give teacher two

weeks' notice till we git another teacher."

Spatz sat down. The Old Mennonite cleared his throat and rose.

"I pass it as my opinion that we got no need to go so fur as to chase teacher off her job. Leave *her* apologize to Jakey and promise she won't cut up like this here no more — and we 'll give her another chanct. Say not?"

"I 'm ag'in it!" stoutly maintained Mr. Schmidt. "She 's showed herself unfit fur to be a Guide of the Young — havin' a scholar up before the whole school to make fun of him!"

There was a pause. Every one was looking at the doctor and wondering why he did not make himself heard. But he kept his seat, his elbow on his desk, his forehead against the tips of his fingers; and he made no move to speak.

"The members of this here board," said Schmidt, "I am sure would like fur Doctor Thorpe to pass his opinion."

But the doctor did not rise.

"Let us hear," he answered, "from Miss Graeff."

All eyes turned, now, expectantly to Mollie.

She stood — and though her voice as she spoke was rather low, it was clear and even.

"Yesterday morning Jacob Schmidt missed two dimes from an open envelope on his desk. In the presence of the school he accused Eva Johnson of having stolen them, calling her 'a nigger' and 'a thief.' I asked him for proof of so serious an accusation and also appealed to the school for any possible proofs. There was no evidence whatever of Eva's having taken the money. So I called both Jacob and Eva to the platform and said that as Jacob, without the least justification, had publicly insulted the girl, he must publicly apologize to her. Also to the school and to me. He refused to do it. I told him he must go home and not come back until he was ready to obey. The school was so in sympathy with this that they applauded. Jacob refused to go home; and he came to school all day to-day. I acted as though he were not there — and I shall continue to do so, so long as I am the teacher, until he obeys me."

Mollie sat down. There was a moment's deep silence.

Then Hiram Unger again rose. "The facs is the same — but it sounds some different, too, again, when she tells it off." He hesitated. "We would like to hear the members pass their opinions."

And now at last the doctor spoke.

"It is by your own ruling, gentlemen, that the colored child is allowed to attend the school with your own sons and daughters. For myself, I am opposed to the mingling of the two races in schools. A child of mine should never attend your school while black children are admitted. But since you do allow it, the colored child is entitled to protection from insult and injustice. This, evidently, is Miss Graeff's conviction — else why should she act so contrary to her own interests as to defend the little black girl against the son of the school board's president?"

"Fur spite!" sputtered Schmidt cholerically. "Because I 'm ag'in her Uncle Mike and *fur* you!"

"Well, whatever her motive, her *action*

was entirely within her rights in her own schoolroom. A pupil of hers was publicly insulted — offensively accused, without the least proof, of a theft. She demanded an apology from the accuser. Is n't that the least she could do? If we had a man at our school (as evidently we ought to have) Jakey would not have got off so easily!"

"Oh, yes, he would! A man would have better sense, still, as to go ag'in his own bread and butter by takin' up fur a nigger girl ag'in Jakey and his pop!" grinned Hiram Unger.

"If you want such favoritism to be shown —" the doctor paused tentatively.

"An example of prudence ain't no bad thing neither fur our children to see," said the Old Mennonite, "though to be sure, prudence coupled with justice, if it could be worked, would go better."

"Anyhow," angrily maintained Schmidt, "if Jakey won't apologize, he *won't*. Then is he to be left set and not get learnt all winter?"

"Do we wish discipline maintained in our school?" asked the doctor. "How, other-

wise, can any teacher work? One of two things we must do: — elect a man with a brawny arm, as teacher — able to deal with big fellows like Jake Schmidt — and the case before us has certainly brought out the advisability of our doing that —"

"But a man teacher we have to pay more!" objected Jonas Herr.

"Then the work we can't afford to pay for, we must do ourselves. If we foolishly employ a — a mere girl — we've got to back her up in keeping order. There doesn't seem to be any case before the board to-night — except the utter inefficiency of a girl in maintaining discipline."

"This is somethin' new ag'in — the doctor standin' up fur Mike Goodman's niece ag'in Jake Schmidt's boy!" grinned a New Mennonite.

The other members, also, looked as though they could not be hearing aright. For the doctor to go against his strongest supporter on the very eve of the election for which he had worked so hard — what did he mean?

"I am not standing up for any individual,

but for common justice," said the doctor. "I suppose we all understand that we are here for but one purpose — to do what is best for the school of the district. If you think, then, that there is any question before you at this time, it is this: — Will it serve the interests of our school better to uphold the teacher whom we have put in authority over our children, in her apparently disinterested defense of the humblest and most defenseless child in her charge — or to uphold the pupil who defies her authority?"

"But when she abuses the authority we gev her —"

"Just how has she abused it?"

"We don't know yet but what Evy Johnson did take them dimes."

"That's just it — we don't know — therefore, if we do discharge this teacher, it must be because of her inability to thrash Jakey Schmidt!"

Amid an astonished silence, Mollie spoke. "This morning," she said, "when Jacob presented himself at his geography class, against my orders of course, his dimes fell

out of his book when he opened it. The whole class saw it. So we do know that Eva Johnson did not take his money."

Unreasonably enough, this statement seemed to have more weight in settling the case than anything that had been said in the course of the meeting.

"Then to be sure, teacher she has right," affirmed the two New Mennonites in chorus.

"I move," said the Old Mennonite, "that we give teacher right."

This was, of course, opposed with violence by Mr. Schmidt. But after a short parleying it was carried.

Before a motion to adjourn could be made, the doctor again rose to address the board.

"The case we have had to deal with this evening has brought out some facts to which I would draw your attention.

"First: A young girl just out of her teens is not a fit person to be in authority over a dozen lusty youths like Jake Schmidt. I'd as lief advocate child labor in factories! A male teacher would not in the end cost us so much, for we should not be called upon

to use up our time in helping him out with his job as we have to do in the case of our present employee.

"Secondly: I am opposed to giving this position to one to whom self-support is not a necessity.

"Thirdly: Graduates from our men's colleges these days are taking positions as street-car conductors, elevator-men, anything as a stepping-stone. Why should we not utilize some of this excellent material? It might be of inestimable benefit to the boys of our township to have a really trained college man over them.

"Fourthly: We have in our employ a teacher who, however inefficient because of the disabilities of her sex and age, is apparently disinterested and conscientious. Apparently, I say.

"Lastly: This is not of course the time to discuss my proposition that we get a college-bred male teacher; but I leave it with you for your consideration until the election at the end of the term two months hence."

He sat down; and for a moment no one spoke.

Then Mollie, looking very pale, rose to ask a question: "May I inquire what I am to do with Jacob Schmidt if he insists upon coming to school and refuses to obey me?"

"Jacob must fall in line!" promptly affirmed the doctor, "or the directors will attend to his case. Eh, Schmidt?"

"I ain't leavin' him apologize to no nigger!"

"The board rules otherwise, Mr. Schmidt."

"And I ain't keepin' him home neither! And he ain't to be left set!" exclaimed the irate father. "And you, Doctor Thorpe, you done this here! You need n't count on *my* wote to-morrow! You —"

But a hasty motion to adjourn which was unceremoniously carried over the president's head, cut short his tirade.

"Well, anyhow," one of the Mennonites privately offered consolation to the doctor for the loss of a vote as they all rose to leave, "it 'll git put out before election yet how you 're so much fur honestness that you went ag'in Jake Schmidt the night before election and stood up for your enemy's

niece — just because you seen she had right — fur all you 're so strong ag'in her and purfer a male outsider."

As Mollie, her face white and strained, walked to the door, the doctor quickly stepped forward to open it for her.

"You are alone, Miss Graeff?"

"Yes, Doctor Thorpe."

"It is ten o'clock — you can't go home alone. If you will allow me —"

"Thank you, I am not at all afraid. Good night," she bowed, and moved on into the outer office. But the doctor kept at her side.

"It would not be safe. I must beg you to allow me to take you home."

She lifted mournful eyes to his. "All the highwaymen I shall encounter, Doctor Thorpe, will not damage me as you mean to!"

"'Damage' you? But that school is too much for you!"

"I entirely differ from you!"

"Which makes my duty less easy," he gravely responded.

"I am sure you are seriously mistaken, Doctor, in your idea of your duty to the Webster Township school! It has a better teacher than it deserves!"

"That is possible. However," he affirmed, picking up, in passing to the front door, his hat and coat, "I am not mistaken in my conviction that you must not be allowed to walk a mile alone on a country road at ten o'clock at night."

But she hastily interposed. "Jonas Herr can see me home — he goes my way. I may go with you, Jonas?" she asked of the little farmer behind her.

"If you want. It makes me nothin'," was Jonas' gallant response.

"Observe how gushing Jonas is, Doctor Thorpe. So you see, I shall be well protected. Good night," she said, resolutely stepping out to the porch.

He did not protest further, but let her go under the knightly protection of Jonas Herr, to whom it did n't "make nothing" whether or not she "walked along."

When the door closed upon the last of

the members, the doctor walked thoughtfully back to the inner office and sat down once more before his desk.

"What an anomaly!" he said to himself as he idly fingered a paper-cutter. "Mike Goodman's niece! And brought up right here in Webster! I can't make it out. The way she expresses herself and carries herself! Kutztown Normal never did all that for her. It 's actually mysterious. Well," he concluded, "she certainly is a delectable bit of flesh and blood!"

Subsequently, however, he found his mind dwelling, not so much on the girl's beauty, as on her countenance, her look of intelligence, the character in her face.

"That 's it — she has a look of *character*, without which I do believe any face is common, however beautiful, and with which any face is well-bred. Still," he shrugged, "there 's no getting 'round the fact that the fiber of her is Pennsylvania Dutch and therefore common. We ought to replace her at the next election. What makes it a bit difficult," he frowned, "is that the maiden evidently wants to keep the job. But she has

no business to want it, no business at all when her uncle is the richest old scamp in the township! Anyway," he decided, rising to wind his office clock for the night, "I want to see what a cultured teacher, not a normal-school product, can do for this community."

Meanwhile, Jonas Herr, walking on the highroad with Mollie, was adding to her wretchedness by repeating to her the reasons Doctor Thorpe had urged, before her arrival this evening, for "putting her off her job," dwelling lovingly upon the doctor's statement that she "used her salary to buy new shirt waists" and that therefore the position ought to be given to one who needed it.

"When it is a matter of life and death to me to keep it!" Mollie inwardly groaned. "The only means I have for working out my freedom! What human being could need it more? Without it I am Uncle Mike's chattel and I 'd rather be dead!"

Though Doctor Thorpe had actually saved her to-night from losing the school at once, she knew, with a sickening despond-

ency, that she could not reasonably entertain the shadow of a hope that he would not, two months hence, replace her with a teacher of his own choosing.

CHAPTER VIII

MOLLIE was at a loss to know what to do about it when again the next morning Jake Schmidt presented himself at school, took his seat and, in spite of the fact that he continued to be ignored, persistently came up with his class whenever it was called.

"At least nothing can be done to-day," she decided, for it was the momentous election day and not a soul within a radius of many miles had a thought for anything but the absorbing struggle between Doctor Thorpe and Mike Goodman. That the contest would be close, especially now that Jake Schmidt, Senior, had deserted the doctor's side, every one knew, and excitement was tense and high. No such interest had ever before been felt in an election in this community.

Mollie herself was not without an im-

personal and non-partizan curiosity as to the outcome. Indeed by evening she was almost as eager as any voter in the township to get to the store, where the voting had taken place that morning, to learn of the result when she called for her mail; for the store was also the post-office.

From every fence-corner Dr. Thorpe's hugely-lettered placards jumped at one's eyesight.

HELP WEBSTER TOWNSHIP TO GET BETTER ROADS!
REMEMBER YOUR FRIENDS!
TURN YOUR BACK ON YOUR ENEMIES!
BETTER ROADS FOR THE SAME TAXES!
WEBSTER TOWNSHIP ON THE JOB!

The lane on either side of the store was crowded for some distance with vehicles, and Mollie saw at a glance that never before had the township so turned out for an election. In the dense crowds surrounding the store, she recognized some farmers who had come a very long distance to cast a vote

for or against the improvement of the roads.

A lot of them, she knew, must surely have been converted en route, for if anything under heaven could break down their Dutch obstinacy against road improvement, it would be the remarkable difference they had found, on their way here, between the roads over which Doctor Thorpe's road-drag had been used and those stretches of road where it had not been used.

The crowds were shouting lustily as she drew near. She managed to learn from a man on the outskirts of the throng, that the votes were, at this moment, being counted and that so far, Mike Goodman's candidate was five ahead; but even as he spoke, another and lustier shout went up.

"Doctor Thorpe ten to the good! Hurrah for Thorpe and good roads! Ten ahead fur the Doc! Down with graft in Webster!"

Mollie found the excitement rather infectious; she could not go home until she knew the end, though she saw she could not get near the store for her mail. The alternate advance of the doctor and Mike Good-

man's man — the doctor at one moment being four or five ahead, then Mike's man again to the fore — kept the crowd fairly jumping with eager interest.

"Mike's man's got it all right!" her informant, a friend of her uncle's, assured her. "Doctor Thorpe could n't down Mike Goodman! Well, I guess anyhow not!"

Up to the time of the school-board meeting last night, Mollie had felt but a mild interest in the township controversy over the roads; but now it occurred to her to wonder on what grounds any voter could hesitate before a plain choice between improved roads and honesty on the one hand, and bad roads and graft on the other.

"It is simply that you cannot convince a Pennsylvania German that what his fathers had, isn't better than anything they did not have. He thinks muddy roads an ordinance of God and you 're interfering with Providence when you use a road-drag."

"Six ahead for Mike Goodman!" came the bulletin; and part of the crowd cheered wildly.

"But even if he is defeated," Mollie

mused, "I don't believe he 'll ever give up. He 'll try it again next year! Win, or die trying, seems to be his creed," she sighed as she thought with a deadening despair of his opposition to herself.

"Doctor Thorpe four ahead!" was the next announcement.

She saw the doctor's car in the road and he himself in his inevitable duster and cap, was the center of a group on the porch in front of the store.

"They must be near through now," she heard some of the men saying; and there was no other bulletin for some time.

When at length the store-keeper himself came forth to announce the final result, the multitude was breathless with suspense.

"Doctor Thorpe wins the election for road supervisor by a majority of five."

A shout went up from one portion of the crowd, — while the other portion looked suddenly as limp as clothes hanging on a wash-line. Mollie felt her knees shaking under her and she mocked at her own perturbation over a thing which in reality concerned her so little.

The cheering continued long, and at length became a cry for "A speech! A speech!"—which kept up until Doctor Thorpe's stepping forth into view brought sudden silence.

"To you who have elected me to your board of road supervisors, I promise that you shall have good roads and *no more graft!* (Applause.) If we must blast out rock to make drainage gutters beside our roads, why, we'll blast it out—and we won't wait to talk about it! What *you* have to do is to educate public opinion in this township. Get as many good, live people as you can to travel over your roads, with the purpose of comparing them with neglected roads in other districts. Get newspaper men here; automobile clubs; influential men from the Lebanon Board of Trade (for every business man in town knows that the better the roads leading to town, the oftener will the wives and daughters of the farmers visit their shops).

"Fellow citizens, your supervisors are going to *work* and talk—in the order named.

"In conclusion," the doctor's voice be-

came solemnly impressive, "let us make the improvement of our country earth roads a philanthropic religion! Fellow citizens, I thank you."

He backed through the crowd into the store and disappeared.

Mollie, with a vague pity for the bitter anger and disappointment she knew her uncle must now be enduring, turned away and walked towards home.

"It will be a harder fight than ever between them, now that Doctor Thorpe is on the board of supervisors," she mused. "His 'speech' was certainly not brilliant!" she shrugged, her fear of him making her merciless in her judgment of a tired man taken at a disadvantage and unprepared. "If I had known he couldn't get up anything better than that in the way of a speech, I might have offered to write him one!—to let him know that though I am 'a native' and not 'a cultured city woman' nor the 'fresh outside life' he thinks so desirable, yet if *I* had the chance to make a speech to this township, it would not be the lame affair his was!"

CHAPTER IX

WHEN again on the day after the election, Jake Schmidt came to school, still insubordinate, Mollie saw that she must take some step to settle the matter; but what to do was not easy to decide. An appeal to Jonas Herr, or Hiram Unger, or any other member of the board was useless; they all lived at a distance from the school; their time was too valuable to be spent to so little advantage to themselves; and every one of them would think (as the doctor had pointed out to them) that if she could not manage her own "job" without their help, she was a failure.

"If Uncle Mike were a man, he could help me; but he would be afraid to stand up to a big fellow like Jake."

Suddenly it occurred to her that she could write to the county superintendent, Mr. Kupp. He was a very young man and

Mollie was quite too feminine not to have recognized when, a few days ago, he had paid his semi-annual visit to her school, that his interest in it had been less pedagogical than human.

"He could deal with Jake officially and I think he 'd be delighted to do it — seeing it 's for me! If there 's any doubt about it — well, I am sure I can land him by subscribing for that funny school journal he edits! I 'll suggest that this story of Jake Schmidt would make good copy for his helpful and instructive journal. Aha! You 're subtle, Mollie!"

She meant to send her letter (enclosing the price of a year's subscription for the *Journal*) the moment school was dismissed at noon. But at ten o'clock the sound of an automobile thumping outside the schoolhouse, sent the color flying to her cheeks and her heart to bounding.

"It 's Roosevelt!" she thought, "coming to do his whole duty as a school director and inspect my work! And it 's the day for civil government! Oh, Lord!"

Doctor Thorpe, wearing his linen duster

and carrying his cap, walked into the room without waiting for an answer to his knock at the door. Yesterday's excitement was not yet so dead but that he still presented, to the girls hardly less than to the boys, the aspect of a conquering hero, and every pair of eyes in the schoolroom devoured him as he moved across the room and stepped upon the platform.

"Good morning," he gravely greeted the teacher as he drew off his glove and offered his hand.

Mollie, endeavoring to assume the manner she usually deemed judicious in the presence of school officials, primly invited him to "be seated."

"Thank you," he responded, and she saw, with indignation, that he looked amused, as they both sat down before the staring school, the doctor's head just reaching to the frame of the motto which hung behind him: —

THOROUGH KNOWLEDGE IS VALUABLE
DILIGENCE IS ITS PRICE

Mollie leaned forward and touched her bell. "Attention!" she said in a tone so

professional that the startled children at once, as one man, bent to their work.

"There!" she exulted, "he can't say *now* that I have n't good discipline!"

She swiftly decided to postpone the civil government lesson scheduled for this half hour and to take, in its place, a subject she knew something about.

But before she could carry out this Machiavellian plot, the doctor interposed. "Are you busy just now? — or may I talk with you?"

"I am always busy. But — I can dispose of the class I meant to call up. I can give them topics at the black-board. Then I shall be free for a while."

"By all means, then, give them 'topics at the black-board,' if you will be so obliging."

Mollie rapidly assigned "topics" and the pupils took their places about the room to write.

"Now, then," he said, when she again sat down beside him, "I see that Jake Schmidt is here. Then he submitted of course?"

"No, indeed, he did not. I meant to speak to you about it before you left."

"You mean to tell me he is here without having done what you required?"

"Yes, he is."

"But why have n't you let me know?" he exclaimed. "Surely you have not given in to him?"

"Oh, no!"

"He comes and sits here all day without reciting to you?"

"Yes. He comes up to all his classes and I never speak to him."

"How did you mean to settle the thing eventually?" he curiously inquired.

"I meant either to appeal to the county superintendent, Mr. Kupp, or —"

"Yes?" he urged as she hesitated.

"Or to write and ask you," she said, her dark eyes looking dreamy, "whether you could n't manage to run Jake down with your car. I don't see how else to get rid of him. He would n't be any loss to any one," she explained. "He is as much of a bother to his parents as he is to me."

"I 'd oblige you, but it might damage

my car. There 's a less expensive way of disposing of Jake. First, however — why did you think of appealing to the County Superintendent, Kupp, who is in Lebanon, when I am right here on the job?"

"So much 'on the job,'" she answered, the color flying to her face, "that you think my inability to manage Jakey Schmidt by myself is proof conclusive that I am unfit for my position!"

"That does not alter the fact that so long as you do hold the position you shall have my help when you need it," he gravely answered. "You 'll have no more trouble with Jakey Schmidt after this morning. With your permission I shall now proceed," he said grimly, "to deal with Jakey!"

"I would n't be Jakey!"

He laughed involuntarily; then, without rising or lifting his voice above a conversational tone, he addressed Jake Schmidt at the back of the room.

"Jacob! Here!"

Instantly the school became delightedly alert, and Jake, after an instant's sullen hesi-

tation, rose and shuffled up the aisle to the platform.

"Jacob, you will make your choice now — instantly; you 'll do what Miss Graeff requires of you or you 'll go home to stay. Now, then? Which will you do?"

"I ain't apologizin' to no nigger!"

"You have chosen. Now take your belongings and go home. And don't show yourself here again on peril of a sound thrashing."

"You ain't my boss! Pop sayed if you butted in and tried to lick me he 'd have you sued for salt and batter! My pop he pays taxes and he says I got to git educated *whether* or no!"

The doctor drew out his watch. "If you 're not out of here in five minutes, you 'll get your salt and batter this morning, Jake."

"Pop sayed I *darsent* come home!" Jake nearly bawled, his face red from his sense of the awkwardness of his predicament. "I 'm to bluff it out to the finish, he says, or *he 'll* lick me!"

"You have n't much time to lose — four

minutes!" the doctor warned, his watch in his hand.

Jake shuffled from one foot to another. It seemed that a thrashing confronted him whichever of the two ways he turned.

"Three minutes," the doctor announced.

Jake knew that not only would his father half kill him if he dared to apologize to "that nigger," but he would force him to go to school no matter what Doctor Thorpe threatened. His father would be glad if Thorpe did "lick" him, so eager he was for an excuse to "go to law ag'in him." On the other hand, if he refused to apologize to Eva Johnson and in the morning came to school, Doctor Thorpe would certainly "do him up." In such a fix what was a poor devil to do?

"One minute!" The doctor rose and towered over him. He was a powerful-looking man. The whole township knew how he had "laid out" Jim Weitzel when Jim attacked him for "spoiling" the road near his place with a road-drag.

"I 'll 'pologize!" Jake growled.

"Very well. Step up here on the plat-

form. Now, then," as Jake stepped up, "first to Eva Johnson; then to Miss Graeff; then to the school."

Jake began an inaudible mumbling — but the doctor stopped him.

"Speak up! Make yourself heard, young man, as you were heard when you accused a pupil here of theft and defied your teacher."

Completely cowed now, Jake lifted his voice and bawled forth the words necessary to save him at least from the brawny arm of the doctor. His father would have to be reckoned with later.

When it was over and the youth, in deep humiliation, had taken his seat, the doctor, without loss of time, turned his attention to the "topics" on the black-board. Leaving the platform, he strolled about the room to read what the pupils were writing. The subject appeared to be United States history.

"Oh, heavens!" thought Mollie, "if he judges me by their *written* English! They recite so much better than they write. And he can't possibly understand the awful dif-

ficulties I have to contend with in their English."

She anxiously followed his eyes as he read, her heart sinking as she felt what he must be thinking of such work.

Washington having landed under Cambridge Elm, had yet fourteen thousand men. Some were drilled and some were not. Some were worn out during the war and some were poorly clothed. The soldiers each got an ammunition. The ammunition got all of the Americans.

The second continental congress met in Philadelphia. They voted to give them twenty-thousand men and they now sent Conlnel Washington and King George III. they were sent over to help them to fight if it were not for them they would not come alive any more. They also wrote a letter to King George and he declared to receive it.

News that American blood had been shed spread like wild fire. Putnam without changing his working clothes, mounted his horse and rode about one hindred miles, to farmers and also cities and towns. Soon the power of the governors had given Massachusetts to Georgia.

As the doctor was reading this latter strange statement, Mollie rose and went to his side.

"Now to show you, Doctor, that this pupil's difficulty lies not in her ignorance of the facts, but in her inability to express herself in written English,— Kate," she addressed the writer, "what do you mean when you say that 'the power of the governors had given Massachusetts to Georgia'?"

The girl turned from the board. "The power of them royal governors it was broke all along the coast from Massachusetts down to Georgia yet."

"You see," Mollie explained as together they returned to the platform and sat down, "English is really a foreign language to them. You know the language spoken in at least one-half the homes of the township is the Pennsylvania German, and when the children come here to school at the age of six, they don't know a word of English."

"Strange, is n't it," returned the doctor, "that so many generations of these people could live in an English-speaking land and not learn the language?"

"Would you like to hear one of the younger reading classes, made up entirely

of children who knew no English to start with and who have had only a few months of schooling — two months last winter and two months this fall with me?"

The doctor expressed his curiosity to hear the class and it was called.

In her interest in the lesson that followed, Mollie, quite forgetting to be pedagogical, taught with a natural and eager animation.

"What is this lesson about, Lizzie?"

"What about is it?" repeated the small girl. "About a feedler is it."

"What is a fiddler?"

"He plays wis his *wi*-lin."

"Spell that word."

"*Wi*-lin. We-i-o-l-i-n. *Wi*-lin."

"Violin," Mollie distinctly pronounced the word. "John next. John, you may tell me the story of the fiddler."

John girded up his loins, as it were, and in a loud voice, launched forth. "A feedler was so lonesome, he did a toon on his *wi*-lin to draw to him a companion. And what did come to him? A fox did come. Is this the companion I want? It ain't. He makes the fox tight wis a rope. So, he is

going on now — ain't it?" he paused to demand of the teacher.

"Yes, John."

"He did another toon a'ready. And what comes now? A *wolf!* Is *this* the companion I want? It ain't. He makes tight the wolf yet, too. A hare then did follow him. It ain't beasts I want fur a companion. And he makes tight that hare — and goes on his way doing another toon. So all them beasts they make theirselves loose and have a rage."

"What does rage mean?"

"It means they would feel angry, is it? — and had much mad over that feedler?"

"Yes," agreed Mollie.

"So the beasts follow him, but a woodman comes and drives off them beasts."

"Now you see," said Mollie presently, when the class had been dismissed, "when spoken English is so difficult, what it is to these children to try to write it."

"Yes," he nodded. "And you," he added, turning a keen look upon her; "this school is a pretty tough proposition, is n't it? Do you *like* your work?"

"As the catechism says," she answered demurely, "I try to do my duty in that station in life to which it hath pleased 'Gawd' to call me — but I should be glad if He'd see His way clear to giving me a better 'job'! Still, my only serious objection to this school —" she hesitated, looking at him doubtfully. "You could use it against me!"

"It would be rash of you indeed to furnish the enemy with weapons!" he returned with what Mollie thought a mocking smile.

"Well," she said with a long breath, "not to deceive you, it's that brutal civil government I have to teach. I'm meditating a lecture on 'What I Don't Know About Civil Government.' If only you'd use your Rooseveltian influence to have the subject removed from the curriculum! I'm so dazed and bored with caucuses and primaries and other low-down devices for entrapping the young and unwary! I'll write a tract against them!"

"But what shall you do about it when women are given the suffrage?"

"You don't mean to say you're going to

introduce the suffrage movement into Webster Township!"

"No, I'll stick to road supervising. What this township needs is not wider suffrage but a czar, until they've learned how to elect decent rulers for themselves and — excuse me!" he broke off, realizing he was becoming personal. "I forgot you're not interested in civil government. And I've been here too long!"

He slowly rose and held out his hand. "If you get into any more trouble you don't need to send for Kupp, send for me."

"Thank you," said Mollie with dignity, not to say hauteur, as she gave him her hand.

"Good morning," he nodded, and went away abruptly.

"I suppose," he mused as he rode off in his car, "quite apart from her inevitable resentment towards me on her own account, she's too fond of that old duffer, Mike, not to hate me! If she were any one else but Mike Goodman's niece and if I were not under the disagreeable necessity of putting her out of her position, I declare it might

be pleasant to have one really companionable acquaintance out here; I have a suspicion she might be really companionable if one could get to know her — and could overcome one's prejudice to such blood! What I 'd like to find out is how she came by that manner she has! Why, everything about her is what the vulgar-minded call 'good form.' Yet Mike Goodman and his spouse reared her! I 'll be driven to demand an explanation of her one of these days! In her simple life out here and at Kutztown what could there ever have been to have given her that look she has as of one who, young as she is, has wrestled with Fate; has really felt and thought?"

He fell to wondering why she submitted to the discipline of such strenuous work as that school demanded of her, when it was not a matter of necessity with her.

"I have certainly received the impression from Susan and others that Mike and his wife indulge and spoil her. So, then, rich as the old rascal is, why does the girl work at all? I wonder!"

CHAPTER X

WHEN Mollie went home from school that evening, her Uncle Mike, meeting her at the door, greeted her with a characteristic look of mingled cunning, glee and spite, which told her, without words, that by some means she knew not of, he had again got the whip-hand over her and meant to use it.

"You hurry on in; I got to speak somethin' to you!"

She followed as he led the way — to her surprise into the parlor. Mike seldom went into the parlor voluntarily. He did not feel at ease or at home anywhere but in the kitchen.

"Why in here, Uncle Mike? Is it something you don't want Aunt Louisa to hear?"

"There 's strangers out back. We eat three strangers fur dinner and we 're got

one fur supper — a *lady* yet! No such a common agent neither! A wonderful stylish towner she is. I don't know what fur business she 's got out here. And her we got to sleep fur one night, too!"

"But who?" Mollie's astonished voice asked, for Mike and his wife never had visitors.

He had closed the door cautiously and now he faced her, with his look of spiteful cunning intensified. The venom accumulated in his soul since his humiliating defeat at the hands of Doctor Thorpe seemed suddenly all turned upon her, as though glad of an outlet.

"You thought you was so smart, Mollie, ain't? But now you 'll think again oncet! No *more* settin' 'round readin' books, still, instead of helpin' with the work, my fine lady! Ha, ha!" he laughed in keenest enjoyment of the situation. "It 's get up at five o'clock now, and work till school time and help at dinner time and after school till bedtime — or it 's git *out!* See?"

"Then you want me to go to the hotel?"

"The *ho*tel! Ha, ha! The *ho*tel yet!

The *ho*tel it 's quarintined! They got a case of smallpox over there! Yes, smallpox yet! And till it 's over a'ready, we 're a-goin' to eat and sleep the strangers that comes. And," he added, fixing her with his small eyes, "you got to help with the work — see? — or git out! And where would you *go* to? That 's the point — where you 'd go *to!* Ha!"

"What wages do you offer me for helping you with your work?"

"Wages? Ha! Wages, yet! Wages to you that I raised! What would I pay you wages fur, heh?"

"For doing your work. I certainly shall not do it without wages — or a reasonable reduction in the price of my board."

"Well now look a-here, Mollie, you ain't a-goin' to git a cent of wages and you 're a-goin' to help with the work and pay your board in full, or you 're leavin'! Now do you understand that? You know me — that I don't speak what I don't mean. You work or you go. And where 'll you go *to?* That 's where I got you. Where 'll you go?"

"What a toad he is!" Mollie was thinking as she gazed with a sickening fascination upon his glee over her predicament; for it was indeed a predicament; she did not know a household within miles that would consent to take a boarder. And even those who might have been persuaded were prejudiced against her by the widespread reports (of which she was aware) of her "high-minded and tony ways." Every one would be afraid to "sleep and eat" her. And should she yield so much as her little finger to her uncle in this matter, he would take the whole hand; there would be no limit to his imposing upon her.

"And I got another reckoning with you!" he pursued vindictively. "It 's put out that Doctor Thorpe he took your part in school to-day in that there fuss you had with Jakey Schmidt. It stands to reason he would n't of went ag'in them Schmidts fur a relation of mine — unlest fur one reason! You know what that there reason was!"

"Of course I know."

"To be sure you know. You ain't so dumn but what you know. What only is it makes a man go ag'in his own interests? A woman's prettiness! That 's what! It 's the *only* thing."

"A sense of justice, a regard for the right, does rule some men, Uncle Mike, though they are not the sort of men you could understand."

"'Justice' and 'right' be blowed! I tell you he 's tryin' to make up to you fur two reasons; one is that you 're the sort of female a man takes to, damn it! And the other is, he wants to spite me back by enticin' away even my own family yet. That 's his game!"

"But what is your 'reckoning' with me?"

"They say you made so pleasant to him, both at the board meetin' the other night *and* at your school to-day, as if you was n't even related to me yet! They say when he wanted to act sociable to you at the board meetin' and see you safe home, you give him as good as he sent. And that here this morning he set in your school a couple

hours! And just so 's he could get on the right side of you he bullied Jakey Schmidt into shamin' hisself before the whole school! And that you set there and took it all, that friendly and sociable! You had n't ought to *speak* to him!" he burst out furiously, taking a menacing step toward her. "And if I ever hear of your makin' up to him again, I 'll —"

He stopped short before the steady look of her eyes. She held him for an instant with that steadfast gaze that once or twice before in his life she had found to have an almost uncanny power over him. Then, without a word, she turned away and quietly walked out of the room.

He made a movement to stop her, but changed his mind.

"She ain't passed her promise yet that she 'll help work. But that don't make nothin'; there 's nothin' else she kin do but obey to me now. Ha! It 's more fun than I seen this good while a'ready, to bring her down off that there high horse she 's been ridin' since she 's home from that Kutztown Normal!"

Alone in her room, Mollie, looking white and tired, sat down among the cushions of the window-seat (which she had herself constructed) to search for a solution of her difficulty.

"That a poor duffer should be so badgered! What is Providence up to with me anyway? Am I so unregenerate as to need all this chastening?"

For a time, search how she would, she could see no way out. To allow the hotel quarantine to bring her under her uncle's power — as he fondly thought it must — seemed to her out of the question, if for no other reason than that her school work alone taxed her strength to the utmost. Apart from that, however, she felt she could not come again under the relentless dominance she had struggled so hard to escape; which had made her childhood joyless and would have crushed her womanhood had she not fought, like an animal at bay, to save herself.

"I *must* find a way out of this! If only I had money enough to go away," she

sighed. "It is the *want* of money that is the root of all evil!"

She must decide quickly upon the course she would take, for her uncle, realizing how securely he held the whip-hand, would not be slow to use it in driving her.

"But there is one thing to which he shall not drive me!" she resolved. "He shall not make me consent to be robbed! I will not both work for him and pay my board."

And with this decision, it occurred to her that there was a way by which she could at least gain a respite. She always paid her board by the month, as she received her salary. It was now three weeks to pay day. She could, without further discussion, seem to fall in with her uncle's plan and at once take hold of the work. At the end of the month she could deduct from the price of her board the amount she considered her work to be worth. If he then made her leave — well, she would have had three weeks to find some place to go, or some other solution of her difficulty.

No sooner had she reached this conclu-

sion than she rose at once to change her dainty school gown for a working-frock and scarcely had she finished doing so, when her uncle pounded on her door and demanded that she "make open."

"I 'm ready," she announced, slipping past him and running down the stairs, for she shrank nervously from the bullying in which she knew he would revel, now that he had the chance. "I 'll forestall that," she resolved, "by plunging right into the work. But he will pay for all I do."

"Ha!" he chuckled as he caught sight of her dark gingham working-frock speeding down the stairs, "she seen she could n't get out of it! Well, that there smallpox sure did come in handy!"

Meantime, Mollie groped her way through the pitch-dark hall leading to the kitchen. One of the reforms she had tried in vain to establish in her uncle's home was open windows to flood the house with light and fresh air, instead of keeping it so air-tight that it might as well have been hermetically sealed. Her aunt even went so far as to hang dark blankets over the shades in some

of the rooms to exclude the faint rays that might by chance steal in. Mollie had insisted, however, that she be allowed to keep her own room as she wished it, and also that she be permitted to air and use the parlor at will. This latter permission, she foresaw, would now probably be withdrawn.

She did not find her aunt in the kitchen, but she heard her in the adjoining dining-room setting the supper-table.

She began at once to prepare the potatoes and other vegetables that were set out for supper.

No sooner, however, had she seated herself to pare the potatoes, than the sound of voices came to her from the dining-room — her aunt's and a stranger's.

"The 'lady boarder'!" she said to herself.

She wondered what in the world a woman could be coming out here for. To be sure, once in a long while a "lady agent" came along with a complexion lotion or a "Life of Roosevelt." But this woman, her uncle had said, was not an agent.

Suddenly Mollie realized that the voice

and accent which she heard in conversation with her aunt, seemed to be that of a woman of culture. What could such a person be wanting out here?

That, evidently, was what was troubling the mind of her Aunt Louisa, for now Mollie began to hear their talk distinctly.

"Have you friends out here mebby?" asked Aunt Louisa.

"No."

"Don't you know *no* one out here?"

"No."

"What brang you out then?"

"The stage."

"You come along with the stage?" persisted Mrs. Goodman, and Mollie, recognizing in her mild, obstinate tone, a curiosity that would not be baffled, felt her sympathy go out to the catechized stranger.

"I came *in* the stage," answered the lady.

"You are from Philadelphia — not?"

"From Philadelphia, yes."

"Did you start right aways this morning a'ready from Philadelphia?"

"Yes."

"What was you thinkin' of doin' here?"

"Well — I intend to — I shall visit the school."

"The school? Do you know Kupp then?"

"Cup?"

"He's the county superintendent of schools."

"Oh. N—no. I don't know him."

"Not? Are you, then, after Dixon's business?"

"And who is Dixon?"

"Dixon he's our health commissioner."

"No, I'm not working for Dixon."

"Are you single yet?"

"'Yet?' Yes, Mrs. Goodman, though I know you think it a compromising admission!"

"Och, well," said Aunt Louisa sympathetically, "sometimes, to be sure, husbands are handy to have — but more oftener they're just a wonderful bother. Do you keep a hired girl, that you kin go off, still, this here way?"

"No, I board."

"Board? Then you don't house-keep?"

"No."

"Ain't you got no folks?"

"Not in Philadelphia."

"What are you doing when you are at home, still?"

"I am a very busy woman."

There was a pause while Aunt Louisa — not yet balked, Mollie was sure — thought up a fresh line of attack.

"Is that all your own hair you're wearin'?"

"It is *now*. I've just paid the last instalment on it."

"Now, think!" Aunt Louisa murmured thoughtfully. "My niece," she added, "she teaches the school. You kin go with her along over in the morning."

"Ah?"

"But I don't think she'll keep her shob long."

"Her shob? — eh, job? Does n't she like it?"

"I guess mebby. I don't know. But it 's got put out how she 's so tony that way and thinks herself so much since she was to Kutztown Normal — and you know it don't do when one wants to be more than another.

Ain't not? She don't make herself common enough."

"Yes?"

"Yes, even with us that raised her since she was little a'ready, she wants to be so much that way!"

"Dear me!"

"Yes, anyhow! And here to-day us we heard that she 's even makin' up with Doctor Thorpe where used her uncle that mean! Yes, it does beat all, the way our Mollie carries on."

"Doctor Thorpe?"

There was a new note in the stranger's voice — a tone of controlled eagerness. "The road-reforming doctor?"

"Yes, him. He acted that mean to Mister —"

"Mister who?"

"*My* Mister," answered Aunt Louisa in a tone of surprise at the stupidity of the question. "Mike Goodman."

"Oh!"

"Yes. Him. Doctor Thorpe he went 'round talkin' down on Mister so outlandish that now Mister he ain't no more the boss

of the bunch out here; and Mister he was so used to bein' the boss,— why, ever since I know somethin' he was boss of the bunch — and he liked it so well, too, that he nearly can't quit! It 's got him near sick, havin' to quit. He 's so bad in his stom-eek since! And sometimes he has so mad when he hears how the doctor 's gettin' more and more folks on his side, that," Aunt Louisa lowered her voice, "he even goes at cursing! Now, think! Yes, Doctor Thorpe he certainly did act ugly by Mister!"

"Just how did Doctor Thorpe get your husband out of power here, Mrs. Goodman?"

The stranger's voice fairly vibrated with eagerness; and Aunt Louisa, glad of so interested a listener, at once entered upon a long, monotonous history of the doctor's sojourn in Webster. Mollie had finished with the potatoes and was half through with the turnips before the recital came to an end. She thought the stranger listened with remarkable patience.

"Say," said Aunt Louisa suddenly, "all

that you 're writin' down — would you read it to me?"

"It 's shorthand. I — I have been writing down the story you 've been telling me."

"What fur?"

"I want to remember it. It 's a good story."

"Yes, I guess anyhow!"

"Can you think of anything else in connection with it? — with Doctor Thorpe's life out here? Had he means to live before he got into a practice?"

"It seems he had some. Then to be sure he gardened some, too. But ach, he was dumn at that! Why, mind you, he wanted the hired man he kep' to tell him how many bushels of potatoes they was a-goin' to raise on his place. 'That,' says the hired man, 'I am not able to say till the potatoes is in the shed a'ready.' But the doctor he was writin' off a piece for such a magazine, and he wanted to tell in this here piece how many bushels of potatoes he was gettin' off his half acre of land. 'There must be some way,' he says, 'of gettin' at this thing. Now if your stalks are one foot

apart and each stalk produces two big potatoes, that will make a quart and we can calculate how many bushels to the row.' And mind you, till the doctor was through countin' he had over three hundred bushels to a half acre yet! You would n't think, would you, a body could be so dumn? And him he wants to be so good-educated yet! Are you writin' all that down?"

"Oh, yes," the woman lightly answered. "Do you know any more stories like that about any one — or perhaps some more about this — this doctor?"

"There 's a plenty stories to tell about *him*. He 's wonderful comic! There 's one about his raisin' parsnips in his garden — you kin take it down if you want. The first dish of them parsnips that his hired girl cooked was n't no good, so Doctor he would have it that mebby they had n't ought to have been gethered till the first frost a'ready. His hired man he could n't tell him whether or no he was right. And Doctor he could n't ast no one else, fur about that time no one 'round here would speak to him, so mad he had 'em with his old road-

drag. So, the next Sunday it happened that he come nosin' into our Sunday school (there ain't nothin' he don't try to nose into!) and he got in just in time to hear the superintendent's remarks; my Mister he 's the superintendent."

"Mr. Mike Goodman is the superintendent?"

"Yes. Are you writin' *that* down?"

"Oh — yes. Well, then?"

"Well, Mike he was just makin' his remarks and he was sayin' that just as some wegetables need the frost to sweeten 'em, so us we need adwersity. With that, up pops the doctor and calls right out in Sunday school, 'There, now, perhaps *you* can tell me whether parsnips come under that head?' Mike he conceited the doctor was guyin' him and he was fur havin' him put out, but the doctor he apologized and sayed that seein' Mike on the platform made it not seem like a Sunday school, and so he forgot hisself for the minute. Ach, that there doctor he 's a reg'lar diel!"

"So it would seem."

"Well, well, here I 'm talkin' so long and

I ain't got my supper laid over yet! You 'll have to excuse me now —"

"But first — may I go to my room?"

"To be sure, if you want. I 'll give you a room that you kin have to yourself," said Aunt Louisa in the tone of making a great concession.

"Oh, by all means!" came the answer with a little laugh. "And when I 've freshened up, may I come and sit with you again — in the kitchen or wherever you are?"

"Why, yes, if you so like my company," answered Aunt Louisa evidently flattered.

When Mollie heard them go out into the hall, she put down her pan of turnips, cautiously opened the hall door, and peeped.

Her aunt carried a lamp, and following her was a young woman of about twenty-eight or thirty, well gowned and groomed, and with a face that was, Mollie thought, both refined and intelligent.

"Who and what can she be?" Mollie wondered, as she closed the door and returned to her work. "A woman detective set upon Doctor Thorpe by his enemies out here — Jake Schmidt, Aaron Butz, Uncle

Mike and the rest? But Uncle Mike did n't seem to know who she was. Anyway, Doctor Thorpe has done nothing they can lay hold of. And they failed when they tried the law against him before."

She was sure that the school-visiting was a pretense, a blind. The woman's tone, at the mention of Doctor Thorpe, had betrayed that, for some reason inexplicable as yet, she had come out here to find out something about *him.*

CHAPTER XI

THAT night and the next morning Mollie saw that her uncle and aunt were so pleased and mollified by the way she was taking hold of the housework, that they were not likely to press things too hard and try to interfere with her in those little personal preferences for cleanliness, light, and fresh air, which they held to be "nothing but airs." To her uncle, the fact that he was making money by taking the hotel boarders; that he was saving the price of "a hired girl" (not only in wages, but in board as well); and that he had so got the upper hand of one who, properly his serf, had dared to defy him — these circumstances combined to give him a sense of well-being and complacency that made him ready to concede a few points to his evidently subdued and chastened niece. Mollie almost shuddered as she thought of his

wrath at the end of the month when she would refuse to pay her board in full.

Miss Jerome, the mysterious "lady boarder," came down to breakfast so late (according to Webster Township standards) that Mollie, having risen at five and worked until half past seven, without pause, sat down at eight, dressed for school, to have her breakfast with the stranger.

Mollie wondered whether the young lady had ever before seen a breakfast just like it. It consisted of an exact repetition of the supper of the previous evening: an upright glass stand of celery, a platter of fried sausage floating in grease, three kinds of pie, pickled red beets, a large glass dish of "pepper-slaw," a platter of dried-out, cold, boiled meat, a glass dish of bananas, a plate of cookies, a dish of fried potatoes, and another of boiled turnips.

"Your breakfast was ready this good while," Mrs. Goodman explained as she brought Miss Jerome a cup of coffee from the kitchen. "I began to bell for you at seven a'ready; did n't you hear it make? I conceited you 'd be down till before

eight. That 's why I did n't take time to go put on a clean frock when I dirtied this here one by drinkin' coffee out of that there leaky tin cup in the kitchen; I did n't know yet that it leaked; to be sure I noticed the coffee got all, quick; then here next thing I seen, it was runnin' down my frock! Yi, yi, such a waste! Well, I bet I won't be drinkin' coffee out of that there cup fur dinner anyhow!"

Miss Jerome scribbled in the note-book which lay open conveniently beside her plate. She and Mollie were observing each other warily, though keenly.

"You 're still writin' down, I see," said Aunt Louisa, curiosity fairly oozing from her broad, placid face.

Miss Jerome colored slightly, as she cast a hasty, searching glance upon Mollie. "I 'm making a few notes," she answered casually. "May I trouble you for the cream?"

"It ain't cream. We don't serve cream. It 's milk. Our cream we keep fur butter, still. Are you used to *cream* in your coffee, still?"

"It does n't matter. What does 'still' mean?" she asked, picking up her pencil and glancing at Mollie. "And 'ain't' the way they use it here is like the French *n'est ce pas?*"

"Exactly," answered Mollie, realizing that she was being tested. "'Still,'" she added, "means *usually,* as nearly as I can express it in ordinary English."

"Are you a native of this township, Miss Graeff?" Miss Jerome inquired as she sipped her coffee.

"A 'native'? Oh, yes. I climb a tree when they try to catch me!"

"'They'?" smiled Miss Jerome. "Who?"

"Civilized foreigners — like you and — Doctor Thorpe, for instance."

"Doctor Thorpe tries to catch you?"

"Your visit here concerns Doctor Thorpe?" Mollie inquired directly, almost challengingly.

"Ach, no," Aunt Louisa answered for the lady. "Did n't I tell you yet, Mollie, the lady says she 's here to wisit your school?"

"Indeed?" said Mollie, such extreme surprise in her voice as to bring a flush of embarrassment to Miss Jerome's face.

"Yes, she 's a-goin' along with you then. You 'll have to hurry," Mrs. Goodman added to her guest, "fur it 's a good piece-ways to the school. And it looks fur rain, too. Yes, when I went out to the spring-house a bit ago, some rain went on me!"

"Are you here to visit my school in an official capacity?" Mollie asked, as her aunt, after seeing that she was no longer needed, retired to the kitchen.

"In a sense, yes."

"May I ask in what sense?"

"You do not object to visitors at your school?"

"Certainly not — when (pardon me) we know who they are and why they come."

Miss Jerome hesitated for a perceptible instant, then suddenly looked up at Mollie with a frank smile which seemed to cast off a mask and take the young teacher into her confidence. "I see I must be open with you. I 'll explain as we walk to the school."

When, in a few minutes, they were on their way, walking briskly over the country road, through the keen November morning, Mollie's eyes were sparkling in spite of her fatigue from the hard work she had done already this morning before her day's work proper had begun; for she felt an exhilaration in this momentary companionship with an educated woman of the world. Until an accidental circumstance like the present revealed it to her, she was not fully conscious of her own intense loneliness.

"I am a newspaper woman, Miss Graeff," her companion explained at once when they were alone. "And I am out here to get the story of Doctor Thorpe's fight for good roads, and incidentally to pick up all the local color possible. You see, the account of the doctor's trial at Lebanon made such good reading that my paper, the *Philadelphia Budget*, sent me here for a 'story.'"

"The school-visiting was only a blind, then?"

"Certainly. I shall not go into your school. But I 'll walk with you to hear —

if you will be so good — all you will tell me of this doctor."

"My aunt's tale to you was entirely one-sided, Miss Jerome. If I give you an unprejudiced account of the matter, will you take my story and not my aunt's?"

"You champion the doctor?"

"Not at all. I do champion the truth, though. I do not slander."

"I shall be glad to hear you, but your aunt's story was awfully good stuff, Miss Graeff!"

"You mean," said Mollie, "you 're not going to spoil a good story because the facts give out?"

"You catch my idea."

"But if the truth about the doctor is as interesting as my aunt's garbled yarn, will you, then, keep to the truth?"

"When the truth is interesting, I have no objections to telling it."

"Do all newspaper people have such delicate consciences?"

"Oh, I 'd save my conscience in a case like this, by simply stating in my article that thus and so was the version given me by

the natives. Which would be perfectly true."

"Do you never have any compunctions for those your stories might hurt?"

"But we draw the line at maliciousness."

"How about the effect upon — yourself," asked Mollie after an instant's hesitation, "of spending your time doing work that serves no use except to feed a vulgar public curiosity; work that is so ephemeral, so shallow? I'm not preaching," she hastily added, catching her companion's sudden keen glance of surprise. "I'm simply curious."

"Newspaper reporters have to live, you know, as well as other people," answered Miss Jerome. "And anyway, Miss Graeff, is your own work less ephemeral, less shallow? To what end that is really worth while is any work that any one does in a world that is dying at any rate? He who can entertain, who can dope the toiling, drudging masses into a moment's forgetfulness — is n't he about as useful a citizen as your profoundest philosopher or greatest statesman? To what end, to what *end*,

is anything that we do? For my own part, I have no interest in posterity. Let it shift for itself. I 'm here for what I, personally, can get out of it."

"But we get nothing out of it if we don't dig deep."

"The deeper we dig, the less we find an ultimate reason for anything. You may find reasons on the surface. You won't find them deeper."

"You are a pessimist, are n't you?"

"No, I 'm not. I don't blink facts, that 's all. I 'm not a pessimist — I like life! It 's lots of fun. You see, I 'm older than you are. I 've long since passed the age at which an earnest soul feels responsible for the universe! I 'm here for a good time."

"But what do you consider a 'good time'? It all hinges on that. To me it could not consist in slighting what seems to me my highest and best instincts — even though I may not find any ultimate reason for following them. Yet follow them I must — or spiritually die."

"In other words, you think journalism not quite respectable?"

"If I may be frank, it seems a mighty cheap business to me, Miss Jerome."

"And your own work does n't?"

"Two-thirds of it does. There is a divine element in the other third, however, that leavens the whole loaf! But," said Mollie, suddenly coloring, "you 'll think I 'm a horrible prig. We are not very far from the schoolhouse now — I 'd better commence my story of Doctor Thorpe, or I shan't have time — oh! Here he comes!"

An automobile came spinning along the road and the young man steering it lifted his cap as he passed them. Miss Jerome did not fail to note the girl's high color as her bright eyes followed the retreating car; nor had the alert interest in the glance of the young doctor escaped her.

"Here *is* a story!" thought she. "The strenuous, enterprising, reforming doctor outraging the conservative, rural community — and the pretty and clever young schoolmistress to his defense!"

"So that is he, is it?" she said. "A good-looking chap! Now, for your version of him, Miss Graeff? I shall be so indebted to you!"

As Mollie launched out upon her tale, she found herself surprised at her own eloquence, her own excitement and emotion — so much so that very soon she intuitively put a rein upon her tongue, realizing that she could not express to a stranger some of the feelings she found surging up in her soul as she recited her story; feelings she did not herself understand; which stung and bewildered her.

But her very reserve told Miss Jerome more than Mollie herself knew.

"And now," said she in conclusion, "you have the truth — entirely unprejudiced!"

Miss Jerome repressed a smile. "But one would think you would be prejudiced," she said, "since this doctor's coming here has nearly ruined your uncle!"

Mollie was silent.

"One would think," pursued Miss Je-

rome, "that you would be extremely prejudiced!"

"But why? Can't one ever be fair and just where one's personal interests are concerned? If loyalty to one's family involves disloyalty to the truth, by which should one stand?"

"Oh, my dear, 'the truth' might go hang! I'd stand by my family if I cared two cents about them. To be sure, if the dear and precious Truth were embodied in an interesting young doctor —"

"You are a cynic as well as a pessimist!" declared Mollie, her color deepening; "aren't you? You don't believe people ever act from high and disinterested motives?"

"What I believe is that the young are capable of the most delightful self-deception, my dear! But there, there! Continue to think, if it makes you comfy, that you would just as warmly defend this doctor if he were a little old rat of a man instead of a big, handsome young animal with a fine face and a noble brow —"

"I am sure I should!"

"Oh, dear!" sighed Miss Jerome, "was I ever so young as this?"

"You are not so awfully much older than I am."

"Centuries older, my child!"

"It is journalism that has done it, then; it *is* demoralizing. Its cheap commonplaceness has aged your spirit by making you skeptical of anything that looks as if it might be deep or earnest. You think everything in God's universe is cheap, ephemeral, commonplace. Now, is n't that true?"

They had reached the schoolhouse door and now paused at the foot of the steps.

"It is most extraordinary to find a girl like you out here!" Miss Jerome irrelevantly replied. "How does it happen? When you come back at noon I shall be gone, or I should beg you to tell me something of yourself. You and I would be first-rate friends if we had the chance."

"Oh!" sighed Mollie, "it 's been like a breath of heaven to talk with some one for an hour who is of 'the world's people'!"

"Even a degenerate journalist. But is n't your doctor of 'the world's people'? He hath an intelligent eye, if one may judge by a passing glance."

"I 've never talked to him except in a brief business way."

"A 'brief business way'? Hm—m," she said, considering. "I should think even local politics could not keep you two apart in a community like this, where neither he nor you could find any one else to talk to! Well — good-by, Miss Graeff. I 'll send you an occasional picture post-card of William Penn on the City Hall, to keep you in mind of me!"

"And a copy of the *Budget* containing your story of Dr. Thorpe?"

"Certainly. *Good*-by!"

She was gone — and Mollie, still with heightened color and sparkling eyes, went into her schoolroom.

CHAPTER XII

MOLLIE'S efforts to keep up with the double work of school and home soon told on her health and looks rather severely. Her uncle, gaining courage from her easy submission and from his confidence in the security of his own position since the quarantine at the hotel, occasionally encroached too far in his requirements — usually when an extra relay of drummers and mule-dealers turned up to be "eat and slep' " or when he was excessively irritated by the growing influence in the district of his arch-enemy, Doctor Thorpe. Every day it was becoming more evident that since the doctor had been elected to the board of supervisors, even though not yet sworn into his office, his influence was such that the roads all over the township were being put into excellent state at far less expenditure than had been previously made for

execrable roads; and that, in view of these economic conditions, opposition to his radical methods was dying out, replaced by enthusiastic coöperation. Whenever these facts bore down with fresh force upon Mike, Mollie was made to feel it in his almost impossible demands upon her.

Experience had taught her much subtlety, so instead of rebelling against his exactions when she felt on the verge of a breakdown, she would judiciously find herself on a Saturday or Sunday morning (never on a school-day) unable to rise from her bed. This plan she found to work excellently, for her prudent relatives saw that they lost more than they gained by overworking her one day so that she was incapacitated the next.

As the end of the month drew near, Mollie wondered more and more what she would do and where take refuge from her uncle's resentment when he should discover that she meant to charge him for all this work she was doing! As yet, she saw no way out for herself. Her anxiety added not a little to the strain she was under.

But another and heavier trouble weighed

upon her. The news reached her one day of Doctor Thorpe's having a visitor with him over Sunday, a young Princeton graduate, whom he had introduced to all the school directors as a candidate for the school six weeks hence.

The very hopelessness of her situation made her resolve upon a last desperate effort to retain her place. She determined to "have it out" with Doctor Thorpe.

"I have nothing to lose anyway — I've practically lost everything already!" she mourned. "So I can't damage myself. And there may be a bare chance of my softening him."

But the means she took to "soften" him was a cold and formal inquiry by mail as to his grounds for persisting in his determination to take her position from her.

His reply was prompt and lucid.

My dear Miss Graeff,

My grounds for opposing another candidate to you were clearly stated at the Board meeting at which you were present:

(a) Growing boys need a man over them.

(b) The position ought to be given to one to whom self-support is a necessity.

(c) I am opposed to the school's being taught by a native of the neighborhood.

(d) I am opposed to child labor — you are too young for the strenuous work of that school. It requires a man's strength.

(e) But my strongest reason I did not fully state. Since you have asked me I will answer you frankly, though at the risk of offending you. We want a teacher of *culture* in our school, not a normal-school graduate, but a college-bred teacher. I am sure you will agree with me that this would be good for us.

Feeling assured that you will be better and happier when we have relieved you of your present too-arduous post, and with every good wish for your welfare, I am

Cordially and sincerely yours,

M. M. Thorpe.

It was in the white heat of her excitement upon reading this communication that she instantly wrote and mailed her answer, some portions of which, she realized too late, were so hasty and ill-considered, not to say offensive, as to make her defeat almost an assured thing.

My dear Doctor Thorpe,

Thank you very much for your full and frank reply to my inquiry. Will you let me be as frank?

(a) The majority of my pupils are not "growing boys" but small children who need, not a man, but a young woman, over them.

(b) Self-support is an absolute necessity to me.

(c) None but "a native of the township" could cope with the linguistic difficulties of the situation.

(d) Answered, as far as I can answer it, under *a*.

(e) Can you get a college-bred teacher of CULTURE to work out here for fifty dollars a month? Of what use would his "culture" be to him here? Of what use has *your* culture been to you here? — for I must suppose, since you value the commodity so highly, that you have some of it yourself or at least know what it is as we "natives" do not, though you have contrived to keep it in the background, for I never *noticed* that you had found any use for it among us, Doctor — though it may be that I don't even know it when I see it!

Finally, don't you think your requirements are a bit incongruous? Can you find a man of culture who has an arm "brawny" enough to thrash "a dozen lusty youths"? To be sure you could elect your man of culture and hire a blacksmith

as his assistant. The "effect upon our community" of this combination would be, I am sure, if not what you desire, at least stimulating.

Sincerely,

MOLLIE GRAEFF.

The reply to this communication was not prompt. For several days Mollie, in a state of feverish anxiety, waited for it in vain.

It was with a very lagging step that she was going to school one Wednesday morning, having called at the post-office for mail on her way, only to be again disappointed — when she was overtaken by Doctor Thorpe's motor. Stopping his car he jumped out and came to her.

"What's this I see?" he asked with a frowning scrutiny upon her, as he stood before her in the road. "You are ill? Overdoing!" he pronounced. "It would be too much for the strength of a horse to wrestle with the Dutch-English and English-Dutch of that school of yours!" He glanced at his watch. "A half hour before school time — let me take you for a short run in my car!" he abruptly suggested.

"It will be a tonic to you for the day! The best prescription I can give you."

Sick at heart as she was, the absurdity of his suggestion brought from her an involuntary laugh. That he should suppose she would go with him! In a flash she saw the excitement of the neighborhood should she be seen riding with Doctor Thorpe, whom every one knew was conscientiously doing all in his power to work her an injury!

"Thank you — good morning," she answered him distantly, and moved on, not deigning even to decline an invitation which seemed to her, under the circumstances, almost impertinent.

"I see," he added, coolly walking at her side. "I am Anathema Maranatha to you! But you 'll let me walk with you? I 'll leave the car here in the road. No one will steal it for no one in the township can run a motor! Allow me," he said, taking the books from her arm as they went on together. "Will you tell me what is making you look so pulled down?"

"It 's worrying about my position that

is pulling me down," she answered — then instantly regretted a statement which would only confirm him in his conviction that a man's strength was needed in that position.

"By Jove! Am *I* doing this to you! But why on earth is your heart so set on keeping that da—blessed school? You ought to thank me for taking such an elephant off your hands!"

"I told you I had to support myself."

He smiled; his interpretation of that clause of her letter had been that she needed more money for finery than her "tight" Uncle Mike would allow her. But that a mere desire for finery should pull her down to such pallor and languor as this!

"Look here, child! You've got to ease up. At once. Take my word for it."

"I assure you, Doctor, I've no wish to martyr myself. I'm doing what I can to avoid it."

"Not what you can. What you must."

"What I must, then."

"Aha!" he said, as he caught the title of one of her books which he was carrying.

"'The Matrimonial Bureau.' A novel. Umph! Well, Miss Graeff, I'm glad you're only reading 'The Matrimonial Bureau' and not joining it."

"Don't be surprised if you hear I have joined one — I'm desperate enough sometimes to resort to any expedient to relieve the monotony!"

"Monotony! I should say! Now an occasional run with me in my car might relieve the monotony and save you from the matrimonial bureau."

"I prefer the monotony. And you seem to forget that I am living in my uncle's house."

"And naturally you resent what I've done to him!"

"The point is that he resents it."

"And you?"

"Not nearly so much as I resent what you are doing to me."

He put this down against her as a rather selfish statement, in keeping with Susan's gossip as to the exactions she made of her long-suffering relatives.

"You are so obviously in need of a run

in my car that for your own sake I 'm sincerely sorry you don't like me."

"If you 'd give me the least reason for liking you!"

"Will you thus tempt a man to swerve from the strict path of duty?"

"As I have pointed out to you before, Doctor, you have a most mistaken sense of what your duty really is!" she said almost piteously, her pride revolting at the tone of pleading which in spite of herself got into her voice. "But," she hastily added, "I see that you are not to be reasoned with about this matter, you are too deeply prejudiced! Do you," she asked in a dull voice, turning to him as they reached the schoolhouse steps, "mean to reply to my last communication? Or is the matter closed?"

"I am thinking over what you have written me," he gravely answered, no mockery or lightness in his voice now. "You shall have my ultimatum very soon. And it shall be," he added, "absolutely my ultimatum."

"Please don't keep me waiting long! If

the ax must fall I want it to fall quickly!"

"It's a case of an ax falling, is it — your losing the school?"

"If it weren't," she answered, controlling her quivering lip, "I should resign at once and save you the trouble of voting me out."

"Ah!" He stooped to pick up a newspaper that had fallen from his coat pocket; "Ever see the *Philadelphia Budget?*" he inquired, evidently pleased to change the subject.

"No."

"This marked copy came to me this morning with a letter informing me that it contains an article about my doings out here. I did n't imagine that our affairs here were of such national interest and —"

"Oh!" Mollie impulsively exclaimed, "I 'd like to see it!"

He at once gave it to her.

"You can spare it?" she hesitated to take it.

"I 'm going to town this afternoon. I can get another."

"Thank you." She took a step towards

the door. "It is time for the school bell."

He held out his hand. "Good morning, Miss Graeff."

But she distinctly avoided seeing his hand. "Good morning, Doctor Thorpe," she answered, then turned and entered the schoolhouse.

CHAPTER XIII

NOT until the noon hour did she have a moment's leisure to look at the *Philadelphia Budget;* and what she read therein gave her a shock that laid her low.

Miss Jerome, Mollie discovered to her horror and mortification, had deliberately made a romance of the doctor's story in which she, Mollie Graeff, was the heroine — self-appointed! Mollie turned cold and feverish by turns as, walking along the highroad towards home, she read the bald, bold story.

"No wonder she did n't keep her promise to mail *me* a copy of the thing!" she groaned as the lurid lines at the head of each paragraph of the article scorched her eyes.

THE PRETTY LITTLE SCHOOLMISTRESS COMES BLUSHINGLY TO THE DOCTOR'S DEFENSE

THE DOCTOR A HERO TO THE RURAL MAIDEN
A BUDDING ROMANCE IN SIMPLE LIFE
THE CONQUERING HERO HIMSELF CONQUERED BY A PAIR OF SOFT EYES

"Oh, Lord!"

Mollie tore the paper across and tossed it over the bridge she was crossing, into the creek — wishing savagely it were Miss Jerome she was rending and pitching into the water.

"*Why* did Doctor Thorpe give me that paper this morning? Just to humiliate me? He overtook me on purpose to ridicule me, for the pose he thinks I took to that newspaper creature! And there is no way," she thought despairingly, "that I can make him know I am not responsible for what she wrote! Oh, I can never look at him again!"

All through the rest of that long day the question never ceased to haunt her weary brain. Why had he been so unkind, so mean as to give her this thing to read? Perhaps he thought it funny! To her it was hideous, tragic!

That night, as with a heavy heart she went to bed, her last conscious feeling was a stinging mortification at the story in the *Budget* and a deepening sense of affront at Doctor Thorpe's having dared to hand her the newspaper.

She awoke next morning with a feeling of depression which instantly recalled the trying events of the day before. She lay on her back, staring up at the ceiling as she thought about it all, her white face gleaming from out a circle of dark hair upon the pillow.

"Why should I care like this?" she wondered, the tears slowly gathering in her eyes. "Why should it matter to me what Doctor Thorpe thinks of me? But," she shuddered, burying her face in the pillow, "the thing was so sickening! It made me seem such an ass! Oh! I do wish he could know I did not give that newspaper woman the least cause to write what she did!"

On her way to school that morning, she turned over in her mind the feasibility of writing him a brief note, explaining the

perfidy of Miss Jerome; affirming that she, Mollie Graeff, was not quite so weak-minded as to consider him a "hero"— far from it! and so forth, and so forth. But she dismissed this as "undignified."

"It would seem like explaining that I am not in love with him!"

Stopping at the general store to get the morning mail, her heart gave a throb that was actually painful as she received across the counter a letter addressed to herself with Doctor Thorpe's name printed in the left upper corner. An answer at last to her letter to him — his "ultimatum"!

With her books tucked under her arm, she opened and read it as she walked on to school.

My dear Miss Graeff,

I am writing this at midnight and shall go forth at dawn to mail it, so that you may get it the first thing in the morning, as I believe you are in the habit of calling for your mail on your way to school.

I want to offer you a most abject apology for what must seem to you my exceedingly cad-like behavior in having handed you that newspaper yesterday with its garbled yarn about things out

here. Need I tell you that I had not read the paper when I gave it to you — and had not even opened it — and that I had not the least suspicion of the absurd and lying character of that article? I trust you will believe how deeply I regret the paper's having fallen into your hands and the annoyance it must cause you — and I hope next time I see you to be assured of your pardon.

Most apologetically yours,

M. M. THORPE.

For an instant Mollie's face was radiant with relief. Then the realization that he was still silent on what was to her of such vital moment, made her heart sick again.

"He hates to let the ax fall, that's why he delays! There is n't the least hope for me now! I might as well make up my mind to it. If he meant to withdraw his opposition to me, he would n't keep me in suspense all this time!"

With downcast, heavy-lidded eyes, she walked on to school, feeling that the game of life was too hopelessly against her and that there was no use in struggling longer against destiny.

It was just as she entered the school-

house that what seemed to her a brilliant idea came to her. Why not lay her case before Mr. Kupp, the superintendent? He was a friend of Doctor Thorpe's and might persuade him to cease his campaign against her. Or if Mr. Kupp failed to persuade him — well, Mollie was sure that the superintendent cared a good deal more for her friendship than for Doctor Thorpe's; and his influence with the board was certainly equal to the doctor's. Why had she not thought of doing this before? She would write to Mr. Kupp this very night! Her heart leaped exultantly at the idea of opposing so strong an advocate against her persecutor; for as such she had come to think of Doctor Thorpe.

But when that evening she went home from school, in a more hopeful mood than she had known for many a day, her cheerfulness was dashed by a harrowing experience. Going into the kitchen to help her aunt with the supper for the boarders, she found, to her annoyance, her uncle, the *Philadelphia Budget* in his hands, raging to his wife about what he was reading.

"Here's a pretty thing again!" he snarled at Mollie viciously, as she took off her wraps and set to work. "It's bein' printed in the Philadelphia *papers* yet, how you're makin' up to that feller that done your uncle what *he* done a'ready! I'm ashamed to show my face outside! Fur my own female relation to go and make goo-goo eyes at *him!* — it *says* so in here!" he affirmed, rattling the paper violently. "To think of your actin' up with him till the *papers* has to tell about it!"

Aunt Louisa, at the stove, turned her wide, cow-like gaze upon Mollie with a look of calm but deep disapproval.

"And you wantin' to be so much, too, Mollie! A body'd think you'd behave yourself more decent anyhow!"

"One thing you got to understand!" her uncle almost shouted at her before she could say a word. "This thing stops! And it stops *now* — or you'll not stay another day under my rooft! Do you hear me, Mollie?"

"You could be heard, Uncle, out in Montana!"

"None of your back talk! I ain't a-takin' it because I don't *have* to!" he said so menacingly that Mollie, pausing in her work, turned her eyes upon him for an instant with a look of quiet penetration that put a slight check upon his blustering.

"Listen to me," she said coolly. "That newspaper article is a lie. Except on a few official occasions, I never spoke to Doctor Thorpe until —"

"You was saw walking all the way to school with him yesterday *morning* a'ready!" Mike pointed an accusing finger at her.

"I was about to add, *until yesterday morning* — when he walked with me for a few minutes to warn me," she suddenly added, her nimble wits seeing a possible loophole of escape here from the predicament ahead of her at the end of the month; "to warn me that my school was suffering because of my overwork at home —"

"What does *he* know of your work at home?"

"As a physician he could see at a glance that I was overworking and he knows we

are taking the hotel boarders. He told me I must 'ease up.'"

"Leave him mind to his own business!"

"He considers it his business as a school director. Why do you talk about his 'making up' to me when you know he intends to vote me out at the end of the term because he thinks I'm not strong enough for the work? Naturally I can't work so well at school when I'm doing so much at home," concluded Mollie, feeling herself a diplomat as she saw her uncle's instant anxiety. He had grown to be afraid of what Doctor Thorpe might do.

"He even butts into the women's business!" he retorted scornfully. "Why can't he 'tend to his doctorin'—that's *his* job—and leave other people to 'tend to their own jobs? A body'd think with all the patients he's got lately he wouldn't have no time to go runnin' round after other folks' affairs. He's a darned busybody, that's what he is; a busybody!"

"A rather efficient one!" said Mollie. "He'll busybody me out of my school un-

less I can prove to him that I am a better teacher than he now thinks me."

"Bosh!" her uncle returned, looking dreadfully worried. "The little help you give here is only good exercise after settin' so much at school."

"It's exercise out of doors I need — the doctor says."

Mike turned away and muttering to himself, shuffled out of the room.

"Now," thought Mollie, "perhaps he will be less apt to drive me out at the end of the month."

For she did not waver for an instant in her determination to withhold the amount of money due for her services. It was necessary, as a matter of principle and discipline, to stick to that.

Directly after supper she went upstairs to her room to write her letter to Mr. Kupp.

CHAPTER XIV

NO sooner, however, had she seated herself at her desk, than she heard her aunt's heavy tread on the stairs and the next moment her door was opened unceremoniously.

"Here 's a letter!" announced Mrs. Goodman, her stout bosom panting from the exertion of mounting the steps. "Doctor Thorpe's hired man brang it. I hurried up with it before your uncle seen it a'ready; he has so cross now I can't hardly stand it and I certainly don't want him to get no more worse! What 's he writin' to you about?" she demanded.

"I don't know," Mollie answered, her face white and her hand trembling as she took the letter.

"Well, read it oncet and tell me; I 'll set awhile."

She sank heavily into a chair by the door

and rested her fat hands on her knees, while Mollie going back to the lamp on her desk, opened and read her letter.

My dear Miss Graeff,

Unwilling to do you an injustice, I went to town yesterday to talk over this question of a teacher for our school with my friend Kupp, to whose judgment in school matters I must of course defer. I put before him some of my reasons for thinking a college-bred man preferable for the position, and at the same time showed him your own arguments against a change being made. The result of our interview is that he and I find ourselves in entire agreement on the subject and I am therefore now ready to reply to your last communication.

Here Mollie paused and closed her eyes to steady herself. "Then my last chance is gone — he has even got Mr. Kupp on his side!"

"It 's a awful long letter, ain't?" remarked Aunt Louisa, bristling with curiosity. "What 's it *about* anyhow?"

"School business. He tells me he and Mr. Kupp have agreed that I must give up the school at the end of the term."

"Ach! Now look! Does he though?"

"He 's persuaded Mr. Kupp to agree with him."

"Well, if he ain't!"

Mollie leaned her elbows on her desk and bent her face upon her hands.

"What 'll you *do* when you get chased off your school then? You 'll never be contented just stayin' home to help me."

"I don't know, Aunt Louisa, what I shall do," came her reply from behind her hands.

"Well," Aunt Louisa sighed as she laboriously gathered herself up, "it certainly ain't give this here fam'ly no pleasure havin' that there doctor settlin' here! It 'll spite your Uncle Mike losin' your board money when you quit teachin', worse 'n what it spited him to think Doctor Thorpe was *runnin'* after you!"

She went out and after a moment Mollie rose and closed and locked her door. Then slowly she walked back to her desk and took up the letter.

I found some of your arguments very convincing. Of some I was in doubt until I had

consulted with Kupp. But when, in comparing the degree of "culture" displayed in the letters I have received from my candidate, the Princeton graduate, with that of your two letters to me — the handwriting, spelling, punctuation, diction, ease of expression and manifest mental discipline of the two sets of epistles — well, I must admit that your triumph was almost complete; for although as you say, my own "culture" is too inconspicuous to have attracted your attention, yet I am so fortunate as to have just enough of it about me to enable me to appreciate how much more you have than my Princeton graduate.

To bring this matter to a close — my talk with Kupp convinced me that you were right about all the points you made, save one. Of that one he would not undertake to express an opinion. But my own opinion as to your not *needing* this position, remains (in spite of your protest) unchanged; you and I do not apparently mean the same thing when we speak of the necessity of self-support.

So, while I still think for your own sake, it would be well for the school to be given to another, yet as I am now sure that my objections to you were ill-considered, I withdraw them. You will not again be made ill with worry because of any proceedings of mine!

Again I owe you many apologies. I shall hope

to receive pardon for my many offenses the next time I drop in to hear you teach your class in civil government.

Sincerely,

M. M. THORPE.

CHAPTER XV

ONE afternoon, two days later, Mollie, reckless of consequences, was lingering at her school long after the pupils had been dismissed; long after her uncle and aunt would be expecting her home to take hold of the work.

Doctor Thorpe, who had spent the last hour of the session in an "official" visit to her, had remained while the school sang the closing song, roaring lustily, "Protect us by Thy *Night!*" and other perversions, without a suspicion of the meaning of the words so patriotically shouted.

When the last pupil had departed, he had still remained.

"Your case almost persuades me to throw up medicine and practise Christian Science or 'whatever,' as they say about here!" he was remarking as Mollie, her pallor and languor replaced with a glowing

radiance, the buoyant reaction from long anxiety and despair, seated herself comfortably beside him on the platform, feeling strangely indifferent to the inevitable reckoning with her uncle for her tardiness in getting home.

"What would I not have been responsible for, Miss Graeff, had I persisted in taking from you what you so desperately want to keep? Why, in the name of all the gods *do* you want to keep this school? It 's quite too hard work for a girl like you!"

Mollie refrained from telling him that compared to the sort of labor she had been brought up to do, her present work was like the ease of paradise.

"Do you know any easy way of self-support?" she inquired.

"If you will persist in thinking you 've got to support yourself!" he shrugged. "I say," he abruptly changed the subject, "what a crazy jumble life is! Out there stands my car, and here are you in need of just such refreshing as a swift ride would give you, after having been shut up all day in this room with forty children; but Fate

decrees that you can't take a ride with me. And why? Because your uncle does n't like me and does like you and you like him!"

"That is n't why. It 's because the hotel is quarantined."

The doctor looked unenlightened. "I don't make the connection."

"When the quarantine is lifted, I will go with you any time you invite me to."

"I 'll have myself elected township health officer next week and lift the quarantine! The other candidate is a grafter anyway! Since that Old Mennonite, Noah Hostetler, has come over to my side, he 'll do anything for me that does n't butt in on his church game. So, you see, I can easily work it! But will you be so good as to tell me," he inquired, "what the quarantine has got to do with it?"

"If my uncle objects to my riding with you, I can go and board at the hotel."

He still looked unenlightened. "You don't mean to say," he inquired, a hint of disapproval in his tone, "that you play with the poor man's affection for you like that?

Bully him into submission by running away?"

"In all these months, Doctor, that you have been among the 'Dutch,' have you ever known a case of a hen-pecked male?"

"Your uncle's is the first."

"You flatter me. Even I (who have been to Kutztown Normal) can't lay claim to such prowess."

"Then do explain yourself."

"It would n't interest you," she dismissed the subject in a tone of finality.

"He thinks I 'm abusive to Uncle Mike!" she commented mentally. "And disapproves of me! He 'll be trying to reform me next!"

It was another case where she could not put herself right. For Mollie had always had a prejudice against flaunting family affairs.

"By the way," he suddenly inquired, changing the subject since she so willed, "I 've been wondering how you supply yourself with reading matter out here — such as 'The Matrimonial Bureau' and literature like that."

"'The Matrimonial Bureau' came from the Webster Township Teachers' Circulating Library. That's the sort of books they usually buy. Their favorites are Marie Corelli and Myrtle Reed. My own contributions to the library are not popular."

"And what are yours?"

"I ordered one of Maurice Hewlett's, one of George Meredith's, and one of Henry James's. They nearly mobbed me! They refer to 'Rest Harrow' in a *whisper!* I've been thinking of risking Bernard Shaw next! But just fancy his views of things in general dropped suddenly upon a defenseless community like this!"

"Did Kutztown Normal give you a taste for Hewlett, Meredith and James? I've usually spotted normal-school graduates by — well, by the size of their ears. You're an extraordinary exception."

"I find it's lonesome sometimes to be an exception," Mollie remarked rather pensively. "Sometimes I have such a longing for a little fun that I wish I enjoyed cornhuskings, quiltings, barn-dances, and snitz-parties."

"What, in the name of Heaven, are 'snitz-parties'?"

"A family invites the whole neighborhood to come and cut up apples into 'snitz' for drying; and they make a festive occasion of it. Of course it always ends in the youths and maidens getting rather boisterous."

"But look here, child — if a normal, healthy craving for 'a little fun' is n't satisfied, one is apt to grow morbid. It *is* too bad you can't — but," he broke off, and added with decision, "I would not urge you to do anything against your uncle's wishes. It is inevitable that he should object to my having anything to do with any one he cares for. About the books — it 's a good thing, you know, to rouse these township teachers out of their rut and let them know there are other notions of life brewing in the world than their own long-standing ones. The third generation hence may profit from the rousing you 'll give them."

"I had not thought of myself as a reformer!"

"Well, don't! It would spoil your expression. You can tell them a block off, these civic-club women who are self-consciously helping humanity!"

"Has it affected *your* expression — helping humanity?"

"But, you see, I never set out to be a reformer. 'Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon them.' I come under the latter head. I came here to earn my living. But before I could earn it, I had to clear the way."

"With a road-drag," Mollie nodded. "May I ask you," she added hesitatingly, "something that has been puzzling me a good deal? Why is it that you, apparently a man of the world and of some education —"

"Heh?" he laughed.

"Apparently," she repeated imperturbably, "of some education, should be content to settle down here? Do you find the life of Webster Township congenial to you?"

"Well, you see, with my little car I can get out of Webster Township very quickly

when I find myself stagnating. But why, if you have lived here all your life, should you see it as impossible?"

"For you, I meant."

"And for yourself?" he persisted. "Apparently a woman of some education."

"It is not with me, as with you, a matter of choice."

"But having always lived here, you have an affection for the place?"

She hesitated an instant. "No," she said in a peculiarly quiet tone — a tone that, while it piqued his curiosity, checked further questioning. "But you haven't told me," she quickly added, "why you, with the world laid out before you, should have selected Daniel Webster Township for your abiding place?"

"For no better reason than that it offered an opening when I was looking for one and because I love the country and hate the life of a town. Since we have automobiles and are going to have good roads, a country doctor's life is not so hard as it once was. I've always wanted land enough to plant a few roses and potatoes

and I 've always wanted to — live in open spaces — they ' liberate the soul ' as Hichens says — and mine was in bondage on city streets and between sky-scrapers!"

"And these things count more with you than human fellowship? — some association with your own kind?"

"Well," he answered slowly, "well — I 've found you!"

"Mike Goodman's niece! 'One of that breed'!" Mollie quoted, unable to resist such an opportunity. But as she glanced up and saw his crimson embarrassment — Doctor Thorpe embarrassed! — she half regretted her impulsive retort.

"My own words are become a boomerang! But bear in mind, I spoke them when I had not seen you — had only heard how 'tony' Kutztown Normal had made you and how 'proud it got' you. But I say! No wonder you won't go out in my car with me! I wonder you 'll speak to me!"

"Oh," she said lightly, "I don't take you so seriously, Doctor, with your road-drags and other and sundry reforms!"

"Look here!" he abruptly demanded of her, "will you kindly account for yourself? *You* a product of this Pennsylvania Dutch district! You 're not, you can't be — I 've been misled, deceived! The Pennsylvania Dutchman of the soil is neither subtle nor sprightly, picturesque nor amusing. He is stolid, immovable, without humor, as uninteresting as a log of wood!"

"It 's well you are not making these remarks to Susan!"

"But account for yourself! How did you come by such a personality? How do you happen to be so superior?"

"You forget," she said impressively, "that I have been to Kutztown Normal!"

He chuckled and his shoulders shook with laughing. "Kutztown Normal indeed! Twenty years at that Dutch high-grade grammar school (that 's all any normal school is) would n't account for *you!* Listen to me! Some day you are going to explain yourself to me. You 've a lot to explain! Don't suppose for a moment that

I 'm not going to see something of you now and then, uncle or no uncle! If I can't take you out in my car, I 'd like to see any 'bird or devil' stop me from calling at this school in my official capacity — to hear you teach your class in civil government —"

"What I don't know upon the subject!" sighed Mollie.

"Aha! You see you need looking after. As a member of the board I consider it my duty to stop in here, say twice a week — or twice a day."

"I 'll resign!" she declared; and as at that instant the clock struck five, she rose so abruptly that the sleeve of her thin white blouse, catching on the key of the desk, was torn to her elbow.

She held up her arm and regarded the rent tragically; "Can you guess — in one guess — the WORD I feel like saying?"

"Could n't miss it!" he grinned, as he rose. "Must you really be going? It 's very cozy sitting here!"

"I know," she answered regretfully, "but I must go."

"And I can't even offer to take you home," he said as he helped her on with her coat and they went out together.

"No, it will be bad enough to account for my lateness in getting home," said Mollie, as he locked the schoolroom door for her; "but if I came convicted of having dawdled away an hour and a half with *you!*"

"Yes — yes," he answered resignedly. "Anything to keep peace out of the family, as the Irishman said. But you may have noticed that when I want a thing I am rather persistent?"

"'Noticed'? Has Webster Township 'noticed' that you 've taken it by the ear and are making it walk the chalk-line?"

"Well, then, I 'm going to put my wits on it and find a way over this obstacle to your riding with me now and then."

"If you 've made up your mind, Uncle Mike may as well throw up his hands and let me go."

"I took Susan out one day!" he announced with a laugh. "It was a holy show! She sat on the extreme edge of the seat,

held on with both hands and emitted a succession of piercing shrieks without pause, until I turned around and brought her home. She 'd as lief take a ride in an airship! If I take out a convalescing patient he or she has a relapse! It 's rather dreary, always going alone. But at least —"

He looked down at her and held out his hand. "You 'll shake hands with me now?"

She colored as she gave him her own. He clasped it for an instant, then turned away and got into his car.

His meditations on his homeward way were an odd medley. Mixed with his haunting impressions of the girl's sprightliness and intelligence, the character, the refinement in her young face, the grace of her lines and movements, there moved persistently across his mind that little thing that distorted his perfect picture of her.

"I wonder if there 's just a bit of hardness about her, in her feelings toward her uncle and aunt, who seem to have done so much for her. Susan says they took her when she was a homeless, orphaned infant.

Whatever they may be in themselves, she owes them at least gratitude. They have certainly done awfully well by her, to have made her what she is! Mike's kindness and generosity to that girl have probably been the only good and decent thing in his whole life. It is so often the case that a childless couple will grow fonder of an adopted child than they ever would have been of their own — I don't know why, I 'm sure, but I 've observed it. And to think of her suggesting that she could work them by running off to the hotel if they did n't give her her head!"

CHAPTER XVI

BUT in the next few days, in the midst of his now pressing practice, the doctor found his mind's eye incessantly confronted with the image of Mollie Graeff. Every changing expression of her face, every attitude in which he had seen her, every bit of drollery he had heard from her lips, reviewed itself again and again in his brain.

"What the devil ails me?" he would demand of himself irritably, tossing on his sleepless bed. "Damn the little alluring rascal! — can't I shake her for one minute and get some sleep?"

Then he would arise in the small hours of the night and indite an epistle to her — which sometimes would find its way into the fire and sometimes be slipped, early next morning, into the post-office.

Why do you possess me so, you mysterious, bewitching young person? [he would write]. I

am absurdly interested in everything associated with you. The Seat of Learning over which you preside for instance, has for me a charm not accounted for by its architecture. Your remotest relative, I am sure, would be to me an object of curiosity, not to say affection. As for your uncle, his nearness to you is creating a halo about his brow! I find myself wondering about you — wondering and wondering until it becomes a torment!

Another time: —

I am by nature an anarchist; incapable of accepting things on faith — without questioning, analyzing; and ever ready to demolish what is manifestly outworn. The marriage relation, for instance, has seemed to me, since my first awakening to manhood, an unnatural and artificial institution — for the simple reason that man is by nature polygamous and it is a question whether any institution that goes against nature is wholesome. Just as a spice, eaten all day long, loses its flavor (for the eater), so the most attractive woman ceases, after a while, to allure a man of imagination. Just so soon as she is no longer a surprise or a mystery, she becomes commonplace and the glamour is gone! Realizing this, I have always been afraid of marriage. To marry a woman and cease after a while to love her passionately, would be to make her unhappy

— and I should shrink from that more, perhaps, than the average man.

A married friend of mine, a spiritually-minded chap, once told me that he considered his own marriage to be grounded on something far more fundamental than mere allurement and glamour. But great God! — what is more fundamental than the attraction of sex? If *that* does n't take one down to rock-bottom, I don't know what would!

And on yet another day, he wrote: —

Every hour in the day, indeed I believe every minute, I am wondering what you are doing, thinking, and, most of all, *feeling*. If you are one-thousandth as interested in *my* internal works, there 's no danger of our ever boring each other.

It has come to me, in the stillness of the night, with an exquisite sense of the joy of life, that with you I am going to have the rare experience of a very real friendship; the sort that will reach far down into the solitary places of my soul; that will open up the flood-gates and let the current of my life flow forth as it never has done with any one I have known. How is it that with you I have always felt instinctively that I might (if I would) yield to an unrestrained expression of myself? And do you know, I believe there is no gift of life so blessed as such a friendship? Yet how rare it is! How seldom we meet one with

whom we can be ourselves and be understood? With you I have felt, in every serious or trivial word that we have spoken together, a significance which reveals to me that you and I can, if we will, deeply understand each other. And, Mollie, the knowledge is very sweet to me. I wonder am I making love to you?

Mollie found herself rather dazed and appalled, though roused and stimulated to a strange state of emotion by these extraordinary communications. It cannot be denied that they were a most cheering factor in her monotonous and struggling days; that they gave a zest to life which, no matter how overworked she was, made her eyes perpetually bright; her lips soft and gentle; her voice very sweet and happy.

So, in spite of the fact that the end of the month drew near, that the hotel was still quarantined, that her uncle (having quickly recovered from the temporary check put upon his bullying by the suggestion that the doctor might take the school from his niece if she proved inefficient through overwork at home) was bearing down upon her very hard, Mollie could not be gloomy.

What she was going to do in the final conflict with her uncle she could not imagine. And only a week, now, until pay-day!

It was not until the dreaded day actually arrived that she again saw the doctor. This time he did not even go through the form of an official visit, but openly came to the schoolhouse just after the pupils had been dismissed at four o'clock in the afternoon.

Mollie was conscious of a change in him as he gravely, almost solemnly, shook hands with her and they sat down together behind her desk. He looked pale, his habitual good-humored, off-hand manner was replaced by a worn look of seriousness, and there was a gleam in his eyes as of a strained eagerness, almost fierceness, before which her maiden soul recoiled fearfully, yet which at the same time thrilled and fascinated her.

Leaning back in his chair, he clasped his capable-looking hands on his knee and opened fire with an abrupt question.

"From what you have observed of life, what would seem to you to be its purpose?"

"Now, fancy being pulled up suddenly,

after a day's teaching, with a question like that? Why do you come to *me* to find out what I am sure even the President of Harvard could n't tell you?"

"He could n't, I know. The wisdom of the ages has not solved it by so much as a glimmer of light! But what 's your idea about it?"

"You remind me of Madame de Staël!"

"Yes?"

"Who turned to the philosopher Kant, at a dinner, and said, 'I have five minutes to spare. Can you give me your theory?' My idea about it is that most people have no purpose; they are 'like dumb, driven cattle.'"

"Just so. Most of us are too busy with immediate tasks ever to acquire any far-reaching, ultimate purpose. But the earnest, the thoughtful, must pause now and then, in the onrushing current — or the treadmill, as the case may be — and inquire, 'What for?' Do you know what *your* purpose in life is, Mollie Graeff?"

"The mirage that constantly lures me even while I know it is a delusion (like the

child's weary journeying to the foot of the rainbow) is the achievement of happiness. Sounds like a graduation essay, does n't it? But it 's quite impromptu."

"The achievement of happiness? To ward off misery is as far as most of us ever get. It seems manifest, in spite of the Christian Scientists, that the race is not intended to be happy. Because, simply, it is n't — except in rare spurts. The Greeks recognized that one must actually be afraid of perfect happiness — Nemesis would be at the door!"

"Yet Browning in 'The Statue and the Bust' teaches that it is only the faint-hearted and fearful who never win anything; who, in their dread of incurring unhappiness, let every chance of happiness slip by."

"Exactly. That 's what I came to talk to you about. To be cautious, to mistrust an apparent chance of ecstasy, of blessedness! — to doubt one's ability to live up to the high calling of an exalted happiness — is to miss everything life might offer! He wins who risks. Now to recognize this is

an immense point gained! It positively liberates the soul to unbounded spaces! I want to ask a favor of you, Mollie."

"Yes, Doctor Thorpe?"

"I want you to tell me about yourself. Begin away back at 'Once upon a time.'" He folded his arms, settled himself comfortably and looked at her expectantly.

"It is n't at all a romantic or interesting tale," said Mollie, and unconsciously her voice took on a subdued and saddened tone as she began to relate the story upon which, in these latter years, she was wont to brood unhappily. "My father, Aunt Louisa's brother, was a physician, the only one of his family that was given an education, although his father was a rich farmer. My father took the matter into his own hands and educated himself. He married a Southern girl of an old and proud family whose people cast her off because of her marriage. A month before I was born, my father died of blood-poisoning contracted in an operation and my mother died at my birth. So, my uncle and aunt, who had no children, adopted me."

She paused, her eyes downcast, her face pale. "When I think," she went on slowly, "of how different my life would have been if Fate had not so turned it out of its course; of what my childhood missed; of what I am bereft *now*—" she stopped short.

"But your foster-parents have been devoted to you?"

"I am not sure that they would have been any different with a child of their own."

"So I have understood."

"But the Pennsylvania Germans are not an affectionate race, Doctor."

"Are n't they? I have wondered about that. They are certainly not demonstrative in their affections. I have seen a daughter who was leaving home for several months' absence, shake hands with her mother and call good-by over her shoulder to her father! But I 've always supposed they must feel more than they showed."

"You know their theory or feeling about their children? Children are the property of their parents and whatever is invested in them must yield a return."

"The relation being commercial rather than human?"

"About half and half."

"So," the doctor asked, "the money invested in you — in your education at Kutztown Normal — you are expected to make good for that, in some way, eh? But how on earth —"

"It was my own money inherited from my father that took me through Kutztown."

"Indeed? Ah, indeed!" Thorpe repeated thoughtfully. "Then you are not so greatly indebted to this uncle of yours?"

"Did Susan tell you I was?"

"The general impression seems to be that you rule the poor man with a firm hand!"

Mollie made no comment. Doctor Thorpe recognized that whatever the relation between her and her uncle, she did not relish it as a topic of conversation.

"Your mother's people," he inquired; "did you ever hear from them?"

"My mother's sister wanted to take me when I was five years old, but Uncle Mike would not give me up."

"He had grown so fond of you?"

"Extremely fond!" she gravely answered.

Thorpe regarded her for a moment thoughtfully. "Fond of her paternal inheritance, she means, damn the old scoundrel! Poor child! I begin to see light now!"

"Then you were not left dependent upon your uncle?" he lightly inquired. "Your father had left something?"

"Yes."

"And you never heard more from your mother's people?"

"Nothing."

"They would be proud of you!"

It came from him involuntarily, the ardor with which he said it bringing a deep color to her pale cheeks.

"Can it be that a few years at Kutztown has been your only experience of life outside Webster Township?"

"Probably no other school in all the world could have given me so much! It gave me the one good, beautiful, bright,

great thing my life has known — the friendship and love of the Moores!"

Launched upon this congenial theme, Mollie, with soft, shining eyes, talked eloquently of those years of her forming and growth, and of her beloved friends.

As Thorpe listened, fascinated, the force and depth of the girl's feeling for these people who had opened up for her the golden gates of culture and of love, measured for him the degree to which she had been starved at her uncle's hands.

He felt convinced, from her very reticence on the subject, that her foster-parents had taken advantage of her; had even perhaps wronged and defrauded her. He knew too much of Mike Goodman's character politically not to believe him capable of any dishonesty that would add a farthing to his purse.

"Yet not one word from her of bitterness against him or his wife! A rare, fine soul she is!" he thought with a throb of his heart that sent the blood coursing to his brain. "If I could make her mine!" The room danced before him as if he were

swooning and he closed his eyes for an instant to steady himself.

"I'm sorry," he heard Mollie's voice speaking as though from a distance, "but I shall have to go now. This is pay-day and I have to call on the secretary of the board for my check."

"Will you let me take you in the car?"

"Thank you. Of all times not to-day!"

"Will you tell me," he suddenly demanded, "on what this deference to your uncle's prejudice against me is grounded, since it is evidently not, as I have supposed, a filial loyalty to your foster-father and benefactor?"

She looked up, as she stood before him buttoning her coat, and there was a strained, almost tragic, look in her eyes.

"No, it is not loyalty nor affection, as you have supposed. It is fear — *fear,* Doctor Thorpe."

"Fear of your uncle?"

"Of his turning me out of his home if I disobey him. You see the hotel being closed, I would have nowhere to go."

"Ah! He uses *that* weapon?"

"Yes."

"I see. It's characteristic of him. Very characteristic."

"Yes," she admitted in a low voice, her eyes downcast, "it is characteristic."

"You've been bullied like that all your life, I suppose?"

"I've had to fight hard for what liberty I've had."

"You did not tell me all your story, then, just now?"

"No, I did not tell all."

Before he could answer there was a sound of scuffling feet in the vestibule, the door was pushed open noisily and Mike Goodman strode into the room.

CHAPTER XVII

"HA!" Mike's small eyes exulting vindictively, regarded Mollie and Thorpe as though they were two culprits caught in their wickedness. "So," he turned his twinkling gaze upon the girl, "this *here's* where you've been dawdling — in *such* company!" with a twirl of his thumb towards Thorpe. "Ha!"

The two, held fascinated by his twinkling gaze, remained silent.

"What d' you mean, Mollie," demanded her uncle roughly, "not comin' right home then, to help along with the work?"

Mollie turned to the doctor and held out her hand. "Good-by, Doctor Thorpe."

He hesitated to take his dismissal, glancing from her to her uncle as he held her hand, as though unwilling to leave her alone with the angry brute. But her eyes as well as her words asked him to go, and not add

to her mortification by his presence. So, to spare her feelings, but very reluctantly, he turned away and went from the room. But before he left, the firm clasp of his hand and the long look with which their eyes met, told her that whensoever she needed him, he was at hand.

"So—o!" remarked Mike the moment the door closed upon the doctor, "it 's went *that* far a'ready, heh? That he stays an hour after school and keeps you when you had ought to be home helpin'!—and that he slings such *looks* at you! Ain't? Yes, mind if he don't make the eyes at you yet! Well," he announced savagely, "this here thing ain't goin' no furder! Do you understand, Mollie? I say that feller ain't to make up to you whilst you 're under my rooft! You 'll *see* oncet what I 'll do if I ever find you and him together ag'in!"

He paused, but Mollie, pinning on her hat, did not reply.

"You 'll go find another stoppin' place, that 's what! Whilst under my rooft, you 'll *mind* to me! And it looks like as if you 'd be under my rooft fur a while yet,

too! There 's another case of smallpox broke out at the *ho*tel. Mister he come down with it last night!"

Mollie felt herself turn pale at this information and she perceived that her uncle fairly gloated over her evident consternation.

"So you see, Mollie, I still got the whip-hand, ain't? Well, now, you come on home right aways and help your Aunt Weesy. There 's three strangers fur supper. When you did n't git home till half past four a'ready, I started to come to meet you and I stopped at Joe Stumpf's to git your month's pay. Here, you take and endorse this here," he ordered, giving her the check, "so I kin git it cashed at the store on the way home. I got to go to town by the trolley to-night and I need your board money to take along."

But Mollie, instead of going to her desk to endorse the check, opened her coat and tucked it into the bosom of her gown.

"I shall not cash it to-night."

"Yes, you will, too! I tell you I need what you owe me."

"It is getting dark; we'd better start home," she answered, moving to the door.

"You endorse that there check first!" he angrily demanded, taking a step after her, but she swiftly eluded him and went out.

"You come on in here!" he commanded, following her to the door, his face red with rage, "and do what I tell you!"

"My board is due day after to-morrow; I shall not cash the check and pay you until then. Please come out now and let me lock the door."

"It ain't hurtin' you to pay a couple days ahead when it suits me to have the money to take to town! You don't need to be *that* pee-tik-ler!"

"But I mean to be just that particular. I shall pay only when the money is due."

"Oho! You're gettin' highty-tighty again, are you? Are you *forgettin'* what I tole you — that Mister at the *ho*tel has got the smallpox? Now are you mindin' to me, or ain't you?"

"I shall answer your question, Uncle Mike, as we walk home."

"There ain't but one answer you darst

give me!" he affirmed, coming forth into the deepening twilight of the November afternoon. "You 'll endorse and cash that there check as soon as we git to the store, then, if you won't endorse it here! I wisht I had n't of *gave* it to you!"

Mollie locked the door and they started on their long walk from the schoolhouse to Mike's home.

"What makes you act so stubborn-headed?" he reasoned with her, obliged to walk fast to keep up with her long, swift pace. "You know you got to do what I tell you, *whether* or no!"

"I owe you less this month, Uncle Mike, in view of all the work I have done."

"What 's the good of talkin' nonsense? You know well enough that I ain't takin' off nothin' fur the little work you git through between school. You owe me your full board! Five dollars a week. No more, no less."

"I am charging you two dollars a week for my three weeks' work. You would have had to pay any one else three dollars a week for what I 've done."

"You 're chargin' me! Well, of all the cheek! Chargin' me yet! Now look a-here, Mollie, what 's the use of your tryin' to row about it when I got you so in the corner? You ain't in no position to tell me what you 'll do and what you won't do. Chargin' me six dollars fur your work yet! Ha, ha!" he laughed aloud at the absurdity.

"You may as well know now, Uncle Mike, that I intend to deduct six dollars from my month's board."

"And I tell you you ain't doin' nothin' of the kind! What 's more, you 're stoppin' at the store and payin' me in full to-day! Do you hear?"

"I don't intend to do it, Uncle Mike."

"Are you crazy, or what? Mebby you think I don't *mean* it that you can't stay in my house if you don't mind to me? You 'll stop at the store and do what I tell you, or you 'll *go* this here wery night! I 've took enough sass and bullyin' off of you and I ain't takin' no more! Not when I don't *have* to. See?"

"If you really mean that, Uncle Mike, I 'll go home at once and pack my trunk."

"You ain't takin' your trunk till I git what you owe me."

"If I leave to-night, I 'll pay you what I owe you up to to-day."

"You ain't deductin' no six dollars!"

"Yes, I am."

"Then I 'll hold your trunk!"

"Then I shall not pay you anything until my trunk is out of the house."

"Where do you think you 'll go to anyhow?" he demanded, almost dazed with the surprise she was giving him just when he thought he had her so securely under his thumb. "There *ain't* no place fur you to go! Ach!" he suddenly laughed, "you 'll *soon* be crawlin' back here fur some place to sleep!"

"Uncle Mike," she turned to him and spoke with a quiet firmness, "if you oblige me to leave your house to-night, I shall never return to it except *on my own terms*. The loss will be yours. It is an advantage to you to have me there."

"You 'll come back on *my* terms, my girl!" he affirmed, still entirely confident of the security of his own position. He was

sure there was not a family in the township that would not be afraid to take a boarder so "tony" and "high-minded" as Mollie was known to have become.

They did not speak again as they walked on. Mike was busy with his mental calculations as to how strict he might make the terms on which he would allow her to return when her failure to find a home elsewhere brought her back with her high spirit wilted; and Mollie was helplessly wondering whether any course were left to her but to resign her school and take refuge with the Moores until she could obtain other employment.

"But at this time in the year, all school positions are filled," she thought in despair.

It did seem, indeed, that even Doctor Thorpe's resourcefulness would fail to find a solution of such a predicament as hers, should she appeal to him, her only friend near at hand, for advice.

She had no hope of her uncle's relenting when it actually came to her leaving, for she knew he felt too sure of his "whip-hand."

It was not until they reached the store

that he stopped and spoke, insisting once more that she cash her check and pay him at once in full.

She refused and walked on; and again he had to hurry to overtake her.

"It is not a question, Uncle Mike, of my paying you a few days in advance or of my holding back six dollars for my work. It is that I don't intend (smallpox or no smallpox) to be imposed upon. The more I concede, the more you exact. We may as well call a halt right here and now and decide whether or not I stay with you. If I stay it is as a boarder, independent of your authority."

"On them terms you *don't* stay!"

"Then there 's no more to be said."

When at last they reached home, Mollie, not stopping to eat any supper, went straight up to her room, packed a suitcase and left the house.

CHAPTER XVIII

BUT what now? She had not an idea where to turn her steps.

Had she not all her life been overworked, no doubt she would in the past have formed a few friendships among her neighbors; friendships which now might have served her well. But there was no one to whom she had the least excuse for going.

Carrying her heavy suitcase, she wandered down the street toward the general store, while trying to decide what to do. A cold terror began to creep over her. It was indeed a unique sensation to find oneself stranded on a winter night with no possible shelter.

As for taking her difficulty to Doctor Thorpe — of course if he knew of her plight he would take her case in hand and summarily settle it somehow. But an instinct, a sentiment, a something, reasonable

or unreasonable — she did not know — held her back absolutely from any appeal in that direction.

As for going into the town of Lebanon, the trolley did not run into Lebanon after six o'clock and it was now half past seven; so even that refuge, to which only extremities would drive her, was not available.

Mechanically her steps took her towards the schoolhouse, the suitcase laming her arm as she walked.

"Surely," she said to herself, her lips quivering, "this night's experience ought to harden me for anything life may ever bring to me!"

All at once she stopped short, put down the suitcase and raised her drooping, brooding face. Her dull eyes suddenly sparkled with the bright idea that had come to her.

"It would work for a few days anyway! And by that time Uncle Mike may relent. Or something may turn up, Mrs. Micawber!"

Picking up her luggage, she hid it in a narrow, dark gateway at the side of a small

frame house; then retraced her steps to the general store.

Her purchases were extensive and varied; fruit, tea, bread, butter, eggs, milk, a small tin box of sugar, candles, a cup and saucer, a little kettle and a cheap but warm carriage blanket.

"This here 's somethin' new ag'in!" remarked the proprietor of the store as he tied up the articles she had bought. "What does Mike Goodman's want with buyin' milk and eggs when they got their own cow and chickens? And since when did Missus stop bakin' bread a'ready, heh?"

"It *is* odd!" Mollie conceded tranquilly, offering no explanation.

The proprietor looked at her sharply. Another sample, this, of her having got so "proud." "She won't even make herself common enough to conwerse a little friendly when she comes to trade."

The proprietor was a school director and he put it down against her.

It was necessary, Mollie knew, to avert a scandal as long as possible, so on leaving the store with her heavy bundle of pur-

chases, she walked back towards her uncle's house until she was far enough away to escape the curious eyes of the storekeeper. Then crossing the road she went back on the opposite side. Passing the place where her luggage was hidden, she walked on down the village street to the extreme end of it. A two minutes' stroll beyond the end of the street brought her to the dark and solitary field in the midst of which stood her schoolhouse.

She unlocked the schoolhouse door, and when she had gone in, and lit a candle which she took from her big bundle of purchases, she stirred up the fire in the large stove and then proceeded to unpack and dispose of her belongings.

While the fire was coming up she went back to get her suitcase.

"Beautiful!" she breathed a great sigh of relief when at last she felt herself safe under cover for the night. "Why didn't I think of this before? Such a simple solution after all!"

She wondered how long she would be able to keep it up without discovery. She would

use all possible precautions and hope for another way out by the time this way became unsafe or impossible.

She made herself some tea and with keen relish ate a supper at her desk, of fruit, bread and butter. She was beginning to feel the zest of an adventure.

With the carriage blanket and the cushion of her desk-chair, she managed to improvise a bed on the platform; and having cleared up the remains of her luncheon and begun to feel the reactionary fatigue that follows excitement, she decided to undress and settle down for the night.

"What a weird experience!" she smiled as, robed in her nightgown and a warm kimono, she let down her long hair and brushed it. "Necessity certainly *is* the mother of invention. If some one else had not said that, I 'd have said it to-night, all by myself, I 'm sure! I wonder whether Uncle Mike is the least bit worried about me. No," she decided, "he 's too consumed with rage at being foiled!"

She could fairly feel the spite of his little soul at her persistence in thwarting his

will and his greed. Yet she knew that strangely enough he would be more apt than her aunt to be anxious about her. She had never known her stolid Aunt Louisa to worry over anything in her life. She was quite sure that were she carried into her uncle's house next day frozen to death, her aunt, much as she might regret the tragic fact, would not be stirred out of her customary calm.

Considering the circumstances, Mollie slept remarkably well that night and when next morning at half past eight o'clock, the children began to arrive at the schoolhouse, no faintest sign was visible to the sharpest young eyes of the fact that since last they had left this room it had served the purpose of kitchen, boudoir and bedchamber. Mollie's toilet and culinary effects were safely hidden under the desk and down in the coal-cellar.

All day long she found herself very nervous with apprehension of her uncle's appearing.

But the day passed by in its usual monotonous routine. There was n't even a letter

from the doctor to break the dulness, nor yet the sound of his motor going by the door.

After school in the afternoon, leaving the schoolroom open for a thorough ventilating, she took a long walk beyond the village. She felt the need of escaping from her hidingplace long enough to keep it from seeming like a cage.

As she did not wish by any chance to meet the doctor, she kept away from the highroad. What she desired above all things was to avoid any notoriety as to her escapade. Not because she was cowardly, but because notoriety in such a case would almost certainly mean the loss of her position. Should the doctor meet her, she knew he would have her whole story out of her very quickly; and if he took the matter in hand the whole township would know of it. There must be a quiet, undramatic way of settling her difficulty.

She returned from her walk exhausted, for her diet of fruit and bread was not sufficiently sustaining for the arduous work of her school. She had managed to eat a

boiled egg for her breakfast, but at noon she had not found time for more than a cold lunch. So she gave herself as substantial a meal as was possible with the limited accommodations of the schoolroom; then, somewhat strengthened and refreshed, she spent the evening in writing to Anna Moore.

What the outcome will be [she concluded her account of the past two days' experiences] I am no nearer to knowing than I was when I walked out of Uncle Mike's house last night. Of course he will soon find out that I am taking refuge in this schoolhouse. Such a thing can't long be concealed, though I am taking every sort of precaution; and the schoolhouse is fortunately well out of the village. But when he does discover me he will be very likely to let me take my choice between submitting to him and being reported to the school board for lodging and cooking in their precious school building. Even Doctor Thorpe could scarcely save me from the consequences of such madness. Anything unusual seems madness to this most "settled" of all races. And I know just how hopelessly bad my case would look to them. Don't you see? That I should demand *payment* for helping my benefactors with the ordinary routine of the housework — for the little I can do out of school hours; and that I withhold the price of my board

when I am making the really unwomanly salary of forty dollars a month (too much for any mere woman to have control of without being unsexed by it), such behavior, I assure you, would be past condoning by the standards of life in Webster Township.

Should Doctor Thorpe discover my "doings" before Uncle Mike does, I think his method of procedure would be to take some family of the township by the ear, or perhaps the throat, and demand that they cheerfully receive me into their house as a boarder. I can't think of anything else he *could* do, if he decided he must do something — which is of course a foregone conclusion. He always decides he must do something — especially where I am concerned. Naturally I prefer "a lodge in some vast wilderness" to being forced upon the unwilling hospitality of any of my fellow-citizens.

Of course over Saturday and Sunday I shall go to Lebanon to a hotel. Oh, Anna, I 'll tell you what —

At this point, suddenly, without the warning of approaching footsteps, there was a sharp, loud knock on the schoolroom door Mollie's face went white and her knees shook as she rose from the desk and stood a moment, trying to get herself in hand and decide swiftly what to do. It was Uncle

Mike at last! A glance at the schoolroom clock showed her that it was half past nine o'clock. A wave of fear surged over her at the bare thought of encountering her vindictive and very brutal relative alone in this solitary place at an hour when every citizen of the township would be a-bed.

"He has come for his money! What a simpleton I was to suppose he might relent! He 'll *never* give in to me!"

A peremptory repetition of the knock made her start violently and quickly step down from the platform. An instinct of self-defense made her pick up, in passing the stove on her way to the door, the large poker that lay across the coal-bucket. But after an instant's hesitation she put it down again.

"No use. I would n't hit him with it anyway — I 'd be afraid of hurting him!"

The schoolroom door being locked, why not blow out her candles and simply keep quiet and not open to him? No use in that either, for the lock was so flimsy, it would give with the least forcing and if her uncle wished to come in she knew she could not keep him out.

So, with a long, deep breath, in which she tried to breathe in courage and endurance, she walked to the door and opened it.

"So—o!" drawled Mike with his characteristic forward thrust of his big round head, as he pushed past her into the room, "So—o! *Here's* where you're stoppin'!" glancing at her improvised bed on the platform. "Aha! Well, honest to gosh! If you ain't a little diel I never seen one! How long did you expect to keep *this* up anyhow?"

Mollie strolled over to her desk and sat down.

"Sulky, heh?" he grinned, following her. "Well, you know you can't keep this here *up*. So you better end it right now. Gimme what you owe and come on home."

No answer from Mollie.

"I tell you gimme the money you owe me and drop these here crazy behaviors!" he demanded, coming nearer and standing over her threateningly. "I ain't leavin' this here place till I *git* it! If you don't give it peaceable, I'll *take* it!"

"You don't suppose I'd be so stupid as

to keep money about me, do you?" she coolly answered.

"You gimme the money or either a check or I 'll *make* you."

She leaned back in her chair and folded her hands in her lap.

Mike regarded her for an instant, then suddenly put out his hand and clasped her shoulder — but she wrenched herself loose and sprang away from him — and with the high-backed desk-chair between them, she faced him.

"You may search this room and take anything of mine you can find that you want. But if you touch *me* —"

She held up a small tin sugar-box. "This is red pepper — I 'll defend myself."

"Aha! Defend yourself with such a box of pepper!" he laughed scornfully.

"If you take a step towards me, I 'll dash this red pepper — *red* — into your eyes!"

"You wixen!" He glared at her furiously — but he was afraid of that poised sugar-box.

"Anyhow, then, you ain't sleepin' *here*

to-night!" he growled. "I kin go git anyhow two directers to come along and help put you out! We 'll take you to a crazy house, that 's what! Yes, a crazy house yet! Throwin' red pepper or what, at people's eyes! You 'll see oncet who 'll beat in this here game! You just wait and *see* oncet!" he flung at her as again he turned and strode to the door.

He went out, banging it after him. Mollie sank into her chair, limp and white.

"He 'll do it! He 'll bring two men to help him put me out! They 'll tell me to go home with him or sleep on the highroad! Well," she concluded, her head falling wearily against her hand, "I 'll choose the highroad. And to-morrow I 'll take the first train to Kutztown! I 'm too sick of it all to hold out here any longer. I ought not to try. I can't go on living in this environment anyway. It takes too much out of me! Everything that 's decent! Professor Moore will find me *some*thing to do and —"

A knock at the door brought her to her feet. "Back already! Well," she sank

again into her chair, "no matter. They can only turn me out. That's *all* they can do."

Another knock, louder, sharper.

She rose, listlessly walked across the room and opened the door.

Doctor Thorpe stood before her.

CHAPTER XIX

DOCTOR THORPE, returning home in his car at ten o'clock that night, tired from the harrowing strain of a long and agonizing confinement case, was saying to himself that, knowing what he did, what any experienced physician or nurse knew, of the suffering and danger of pregnancy and child-birth, if he ever did marry it would be an act of unadulterated selfishness.

"And yet," he mused, "there is the uncontrovertible fact that widows are usually keener for marriage than maidens. Why? It 's not that they want more of motherhood; or more of the care, pain and worry which they 've learned go along with the precious man! Is it just the insatiable feminine longing to be owned and cherished by a male? It seems pitiable, pathetic! Yet, if it 's natural! — well, well, I suppose God did know what He was about

when 'male and female created He them.'"

He slowed up as he came within a half mile of the schoolhouse.

"To such a pass have I come," he thought, "that even when she is n't in it, I yearn to gaze on the edifice that knows her presence through so much of the day! Hello! What 's this?"

Startled at what he suddenly noticed he pulled up short. From the distance of a quarter of a mile, he distinctly saw, at the foot of the straight road he had been traversing, a dim light at the two front windows of the school building. In his quick apprehension of some disaster to Mollie, Thorpe's heart gave a great wild throb in his breast.

"Now what under Heaven does *that* mean? Why is she, or any one, here at ten o'clock at night?"

Quickly deciding that he must solve the mystery without letting his motor give warning of his approach, he jumped out, left the car standing on the pike and ran swiftly down the road to the foot of the long slope.

Only the two front windows of the building were without shutters and from them he could see naught but rows of empty desks. They did not look in on the platform. He could hear no sound within.

He stepped to the door and knocked, waited a moment, then knocked again.

The door opened — and Mollie, looking white and strained, stood before him. At sight of him she seemed suddenly to collapse. She leaned against the wall, clutching at the door-knob to hold herself up. But before he could speak, she had rallied.

"Is this an official visit?" she inquired, her eyes all at once very bright as they rested upon him.

"Decidedly so," he answered, stepping inside and closing the door. "As a member of the school board, I prohibit the teacher from such reckless disregard of her own safety as to be alone in this building at ten o'clock at night!"

"In the eyes of this community, Doctor, the danger would consist in your being here with me!"

"That is so true that you must come

away from here with me at once! — What on earth!"

His eye, falling upon the platform, saw a cushion and a carriage robe spread upon the floor as though for a make-shift bed. Over the chair hung a kimono; on the desk was an open suitcase.

His glance returned to Mollie's face, noting its pallor and the heavy-lidded eyes.

There was something which shone from his countenance upon her misery that suddenly made her own eyes fall and two great tears roll down her face.

"Mollie!"

She looked up. He held out his hands. "Come here!"

But she stepped back, shaking her head as she wiped the tears from her cheeks.

"If you love me, come to me."

She tried to speak, but again she only mutely shook her head.

"You do love me!" he affirmed.

"How did you know? That is, what makes you suppose anything so —"

"It would be unlikely indeed, but that I can't believe Providence could be so waste-

ful," he exclaimed, his own face going as white as hers, under the strong emotion that shook him, "as to leave such love as mine for you unreturned! You 've taken possession of me, Mollie! I 'm yours, soul, mind and body!"

"It is only that you pity me! You find me in this plight and you feel me a responsibility on your hands that you don't know what to do with!"

"A responsibility that I know *exactly* what to do with! Don't attribute to me an unselfishness that any sane man would be incapable of, Mollie!"

"But what — what *is* it," she faltered, "that you would do with me?"

"Put you in my car and take you to the nearest minister's."

"Ignoring details like a marriage license and a trousseau!"

"When I was with you here yesterday and your uncle came in, I foresaw an emergency. I promptly provided for it. The marriage license is in my pocket!" he announced, tapping his breast. "Not that you ever gave me any reason to sup-

pose that you loved me — but, as I said, I have too much respect for the ways of Providence to think it capable of such mad waste!"

"Oh!" Mollie gazed at him in utter bewilderment, but the wan pallor of her aspect was changing to a radiance that made the strong man's knees tremble under him.

"But," she breathed, "we don't know each other! I — I don't even know your first name! How can I be married to a man without knowing his first name?"

"A difficulty easily surmounted — you can say it after the minister. And you need not be alarmed because you don't know me. All my friends tell me that I improve on acquaintance and I don't see why my wife should n't find the same thing."

"But shall you find *me* to improve on acquaintance when I am 'no longer a surprise or a mystery'?"

"Mollie, it will take me the rest of my life to get over being surprised at you!"

"Surprised that Mike Goodman's niece can speak grammatical English! You will

soon get used to *that* and then the 'glamour will be gone.'"

"It is not your excellent English that makes the glamour and the halo."

"People would think you had married me to reform me! The doctor's latest activity in reforms! Undertakes to cure Mollie Graeff of her 'tony ways'!"

"But they accuse me of tony ways, too, Mollie. And just think of the boom to my practice when it gets abroad that you and I took a motor-ride to-night to the minister's and returned in triumph to —"

"To Susan!"

"My office will have to be enlarged to hold the patients that will be seized with lumbago and rheumatism in order to take a look-in on us!"

"If you want to marry me for an advertisement —"

"I assure you that is not my paramount reason for seeking your hand."

"But — but my school!"

"Damn your school!"

"That is n't public-spirited of you. And I 'm afraid of Susan."

"Damn — that is, bless — Susan! Think of such food for her curiosity and love of gossip!"

"If we go and get married we can't possibly sue Miss Jerome of the *Philadelphia Budget* for slander."

"Let us forget her. Providence always takes care of people like her; her course of life reaps its own reward. Look here, Mollie!" his voice grew deep as he took her two hands in his and drew her gently to him, "you and I have found each other — and nothing in earth, heaven or hell shall separate us! You do love me? — you have loved me all along? — as I have you!"

"How could I help it?" breathed Mollie, her bosom heaving, her countenance illumined. "Does one meet a man like you more than *once* in a lifetime? And coming as you did upon the loneliness, the colorlessness of my life! How could I help it? Ever since I first laid eyes upon you I have thought of nothing but you, night and day!"

"And I — that night you came to my office to meet the school board,— when you

and I looked into each other's eyes, Mollie, I think I knew then as well as I know now that you were doomed to haunt me for the rest of my days! Come to me, Mollie!"

He folded his arms about her, and Mollie, unable to restrain longer the ecstasy that flooded her heart and enveloped her whole being, melted to him at last, and laid her face on his breast.

"Oh, Mollie — Mollie!" he murmured, closing his eyes before the dizzy height of his happiness as his lips touched hers, "I am unworthy of such a gift of the gods!"

"But to me," smiled Mollie, "you are yourself a god — and always will be!"

When fifteen minutes later Mike returned with his two school directors, Mollie and the doctor were on their way to Lebanon.

THE END